

## **CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL**

<b>Date and Time :-</b>	<b>Monday 13 November 2023 at 2.00 p.m.</b>
<b>Venue:-</b>	<b>Rotherham Town Hall, Moorgate Street, Rotherham.</b>
<b>Membership:-</b>	<b>Councillors Browne, C. Carter, Z. Collingham, Cusworth (Chair), and Pitchley (Vice-Chair)</b>
<b>Contact</b>	<b>Natasha Aucott, Governance Advisor Natasha.aucott@rotherham.gov.uk</b>

The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

### **AGENDA**

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

To receive the apologies of any Panel Member who is unable to attend the meeting.

#### **2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 3 - 10)**

To consider the minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held on 12 September 2023 and approve them as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

#### **3. Declarations of Interest**

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

#### **4. Exclusion of the Press and Public**

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

#### **5. The One Adoption South Yorkshire Annual Report Update (Pages 11 - 48)**

To receive an update on the One Adoption South Yorkshire Annual Report.

#### **6. The Fostering Service Annual Report 2022-2023 Update (Pages 49 - 82)**

To receive an update on the Fostering Service Annual Report for the period of 2022-2023.

**7. The Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028 (Pages 83 - 109)**

To receive an update on the draft Fostering Rotherham Plan 2023-2028.

**8. The Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer Update (Pages 111 - 123)**

To receive an update on the Rotherham Care Leavers Local Offer.

**9. The Leaving Care Action Plan Update (Pages 125 - 128)**


To receive an update on the draft Leaving Care Action Plan.

**10. Urgent Business**

To determine any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

**11. Date and Time of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel will be held on Tuesday 12th December, commencing at 4:00 p.m in Rotherham Town Hall.



Sharon Kemp,  
Chief Executive.

**CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL  
Tuesday 12 September 2023**

Present:- Councillor Cusworth (in the Chair); Councillors Browne and Z. Collingham.

Also in attendance:- Lynda Briggs, Nicola Curley, Laura Gough, Monica Green, Jo Hacking, Justine Hirst, Tina Hohn, Joanne McCartan, Jane Wood and Cathryn Woodward.

Apologies for absence:- Apologies were received from Councillor Pitchley, Lisa Duvalle and Anne Hawke.

**93. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pitchley, Lisa Duvalle, and Anne Hawke.

**94. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

Resolved:- The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2023, were agreed as a true record.

It was noted that the Looked After Council's Summer Festival had taken place and been a great success despite the weather. Some learning had been taken away from the day and considered for next year's event.

**95. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest made at the meeting.

**96. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no items on the agenda requiring the exclusion of any press or members of the public.

**97. FOSTERING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

Monica Green, Assistant Director Children's Services, gave a brief verbal update on the current position with regard to the recruitment and retention of foster carers.

In the last year, the Authority would show a net gain (approximately 12) in the number of foster carers with a high proportion of foster carers transferring from IFAs.

The Chair reported that the Cabinet Member Working Group was

ongoing; once the work had been completed it would be reported to the Panel.

Resolved:- That the update be noted.

#### **98. THE REVIEW OF FOSTERING PANEL**

Monica Green, Assistant Director Children's Services, gave a verbal update on the review of the Fostering Panel which had been very positive finding that the Panel was very effective and well attended.

There was a small number of recommendations one of which was that the Panel Advisor be paid accordingly. This was currently being considered by the Directorate Leadership Team.

There was also no legal requirement for Elected Members to sit on the Panel. Members had continued to be part of the membership during recent years to retain oversight, however, it was a huge time commitment. The Corporate Parenting Panel/Board was to increase its number of meetings with Elected Members encouraged to participate.

A meeting was to take place with the Assistant Director Legal Services to discuss the Fostering Panel as well as others and how they linked operationally. Consideration will be given to asking Internal Audit to review it and submitted to the Audit Committee.

Resolved:- That the update be noted.

#### **99. PERFORMANCE ON A PAGE**

Cathryn Woodward, Performance and Business Intelligence Manager, presented the submitted report which provided a summary of performance for Key Indicators across Looked After Children Services for Quarter 1 2023/24. It also included a summary of Service performance in comparison to the same period in 2022/23 and trend data, graphical analysis and the latest benchmarking data against national and statistical neighbour averages (where possible). The following was outlined:-

- The number of children entering care was slightly lower than the previous year
- 92.1% of eligible Looked after Children had an up-to-date plan. This was a slight decrease on the year's performance, with the aimed target being 95%
- 77.1% of placements were family based, this was a 2.9% decrease on last year.
- 67.8% of Looked after Children were in a stable placement for 2 or more years, this was slightly higher than the previous year
- There were currently 112 in-house foster families, with 3 new

approvals throughout the year. There had been 2 de-registrations, 5 less than last year

- It was noted that 10 Looked after Children were known to the Youth Justice Team.
- 7 children had been adopted, which was a decrease by one compared to the same period in the previous year
- The overall percentage of Looked after Children who had an initial health assessment within timescale had decreased in comparison to the previous year and 82.7% had up-to-date health assessments
- Dental assessments had improved compared to the previous year - 80.2% (improvement of 8.1%)
- 91.8% of reviews were completed within the timescale set, this was a slight reduction to the previous year. 94.4% of visits were up-to-date and within timescales of the national minimum standard
- At the end of quarter four, there were 331 young people in the care leavers cohort which showed an increase of 29
- 78.9% of care leavers had an up-to-date pathway plan at the end of the quarter and 96.1% of care leavers were in suitable accommodation. 71.9% of care leavers were in education, employment, and training
- 54 young people had been discharged from care at the end of quarter 1, down 3 on the previous year

Tina Hohn, Virtual School Head Teacher, reported that, because educationally they measured on an academic term, the outputs could sometimes be slightly different when they were captured. The Virtual School had 2 levels as their plans ranged from birth to 18 years. From birth, 99.6% of the PEP meetings had taken place and 100% for school age children.

Discussion ensued with the following issues raised/clarified:-

- Care leavers not in suitable accommodation – the Authority provided good accommodation that was suitable for care leavers, however, some choose to seek alternative accommodation that the Service would not consider suitable but not necessarily unsafe/dangerous. Also some adults were difficult to get hold off to find out where they were staying
- EET – what support was available around transport costs? The Service knew that it supplemented some of it and it would never be a barrier to young people accessing education. It was hoped to discuss a possible pilot scheme with bus companies
- Initial Health Assessments – in the early part of the year there had been quite a lot of unaccompanied asylum seeker children. They were offered a double slot because of the interpreting needs etc., however, for some it was the third attempt before they actually attended resulting in a number of wasted slots. The young people had been offered appointments within the set timescales but were out of time by the time they actually attended

The Chair thanked officers for the comprehensive report and for highlighting key performance areas.

Resolved: - That the report and the accompanying dataset be received.

#### **100. THE STATEMENT OF INTENT FOR CORPORATE PARENTING**

Monica Green, Assistant Director Children's Services, reported on the intended process for the reviewing the Corporate Parenting Strategy which was significantly overdue. It was the intention to refresh the Strategy in 2023 to cover 2024-2027.

It was critical that there was engagement with all key stakeholders to ensure a co-produced Strategy outlining how the Council would meet the needs of their cared for and care experienced young people.

The draft Strategy would be presented at the Corporate Parenting Board in December 2023 and Cabinet early in 2024 outlining how the Council would fulfil its corporate parenting responsibility.

Tina Hohn, Virtual School Head Teacher, reported that the Virtual School had an agreed permanence plan for each child and worked with the Adoption/Fostering Teams and Early Years. Ofsted had commented that they had liked the ability to see the full picture.

Resolved:- That the position statement be noted.

#### **101. THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER REPORT**

Joanne McCartan, Service Manager Safeguarding, gave the following powerpoint presentation highlighting:-

- IRO outcomes
- Quality assurance
- Children's participation in reviews
- Health of Looked After Children
- Education of Looked After Children
- Placement stability
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Adoption
- Key actions for 2023-24

Attention was drawn/discussion ensued on the following:-

- The IRO Service had delivered 1,600 reviews, 91.7% in timescale
- 94.8% of children had an up-to-date care plan. Care plans should be updated within 10 days of the LAC review. This was tracked by the IRO
- 41.8% of children who had been LAC 6 months or more had had

a Midway Review. This was a decrease of 67.5% from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2022

- 273 children had been visited within the last 6 months (52.7%)
- The voice of the child was central to IRO practice. Visits were explored in supervision with each IRO to ensure there was planning around this. For those children that might not want to see their IRO, alternative ways of ensuring the voice of the child was being explored. One IRO had developed refreshed booklets to try and encourage children to record their view for their review
- An escalation dashboard was being worked up and would feature in the 2023/24 annual report
- Quality assurance provided the opportunity to ensure that the Local Authority was carrying out its duties to those children it looked after. IROs independence was key to holding the Local Authority to account
- IROs had several avenues for progressing plans and ensuring oversight i.e. IRO footprint
- Where there were concerns that a child's care journey was drifting or serious concerns about the standard of care and Social Work intervention, the IRO will most commonly revert to a formal escalation
- 163 escalation discussion case notes were recorded. 95 formal escalations raised. All of these were resolved at either stage 1 or 2. The overwhelming rationale for the escalations related to drift and delay including no pre-meeting reports, delay in discharge of orders, assessment not completed timely or delay in important work such as life story
- Children and young people encouraged and supported to attend their reviews with some feeling confident to chair them themselves
- IROs encouraged to speak with the child prior to the review to discuss venue, attendees and what they wanted to discuss. IRO visits had increased since the pandemic
- Face-to-face meetings were now standard practice unless the voice of child indicated another preference
- The Service worked close with the Rights 2 Rights Advocacy Services to ensure that those children who required/requested an advocate were supported and heard in the process
- 656 children had felt able to attend the reviews and speak for themselves. The focus for the next 12 months was how to increase attendance at their LAC reviews
- 376 children had an up-to-date Health Assessment (93.1%), 28% did not have a Health Assessment (6.9%), 11 assessments were refused and 150 Initial Health Assessments were carried out and of those 59.3% were within the 20 days timescale. There was a need to be clear as to why a child refused a health assessment as there was currently no recording system to identify why a health/dental assessment had been refused
- 350 children had a recorded up-to-date dental assessment

(86.6%), 54 young people (13.4%) did not have an up-to-date appointment

- 96.7% of children had an up-to-date PEP
- Placement stability had decreased by approximately 6%; 142 out of 220 children who had/had been in placement for over 2.5 years
- During the year 536 new placements had commenced with 354 of those being placement moves i.e. for children already in Local Authority care. 9.96% (54) young people experienced placement instability of 3 years or more
- The IRO maintained oversight of placement instability and the impact on the child, reviewing changes in placement and raising appropriate escalations if necessary
- As at 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2023, the Local Authority had 36 children in its care who were considered to be unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Combining with those that turned 18 and were part of the Learning Care Service, this increased to 66
- All of these young people were subject to Section 20 Agreements
- A slight reduction had begun to be seen with 39 presenting at the beginning of the year to 36 in March 2023
- There had been 24 adoptions in the period concerned
- A lot of work had been done with Social Workers in the last 6 months trying to enforce the importance of reports submitted before the review meeting. Reviews were now stood down if a report had not been received and formal discussion would be entered into followed by escalation if the completed report was not received prior to the review
- Work was also taking place on developing a care plan and looking at the assessment and pre-review report for LAC to make it child focussed and not as long
- The Authority had a really good voice of the child offer but consideration was being given as to how that could be restructured and give a holistic picture and the wider care population

Resolved:- That the presentation and 2022/23 annual report be noted.

## **102. THE LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER REPORT**

Joanne McCartan, Service Manager Safeguarding, gave the following powerpoint presentation highlighting:-

- 4 year comparison of LADO contacts
- Allegation types
- LADO outcomes
- LADO final outcome
- Development and awareness
- What needs to happen next

Attention was drawn/discussion ensued on the following:-



- A higher proportion of referrals progressed to a LADO investigation in 2022/23
- Effective multi-agency training regarding LADO threshold was ensuring appropriate referrals were being made
- The highest number of LADO's managed related to professional conduct issues which covered a wide range of concerns including behaviour outside of work as well as issues within employment
- The second highest was physical abuse and incidents where there was physical restraint and altercations often relating to those who worked closely with children e.g. residential carers, foster carers
- 82 concluded investigations in 2022/23 with 13.6% concluded with the member of staff still in employment with a risk assessment in place, 12.3% required further Safeguarding training/additional monitoring and training and 24.7% dismissed/resigned or suspended
- The "false" category was only added as an outcome in 2022/23 so information not available for previous years
- Referrals to DBS and regulatory bodies had remained consistent and proportionate. It reflected the 25.9% of workers who remained in post with a risk assessment in place or further supervision/monitoring/training
- Continued training provided to RMBC foster carers to support them to understand the role of LADO and the process when a referral was made as well as through the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership and attended by professionals
- RMBC inhouse residential children's homes offered support and guidance. A bespoke support package was in place during a very vulnerable young person's transition which assisted staff to consider what was a complaint vs what was an allegation
- The lead LADO in Rotherham and Sheffield had provided joint training with Assemblies of God Churches across South Yorkshire in November 2022
- Attendance at regular networking meetings with LADO staff from South Yorkshire as well as regional meetings with Yorkshire and Humberside
- Continued links with Yorkshire Sport Foundation and Diocesan Safeguarding to support safe practice

Resolved:- That the presentation and the 2022/23 annual report be noted.

**103. URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business to report.

**104. DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Resolved:- That a further meeting be held on Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, commencing at 2.00 p.m.



**One**  
Adoption  
Agency  
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

# One Adoption South Yorkshire

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ANNUAL REPORT  
FOR 2022/2023



# FOREWORD

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This is the second Annual Report from One Adoption South Yorkshire. We are very proud to share with you all we have achieved in our second year of operation.

Our second year has been one of development and growth, building on learning and observation from year one. Much has been achieved. Key personnel have moved into key development posts. The new Panel structure has been consolidated, and with the help of our excellent Panel Chairs and Panel Advisers has begun to function effectively across all four areas. We are one of the few RAAs nationally which have returned to actual adoption panels, and we believe that actually coming together once again to make such important decisions in children's and adopters' lives is a real achievement in a post-pandemic world.

The compact geography and the easy transport links across South Yorkshire support close, actual working, across the four local teams and work very much to our advantage in creating the new combined agency.

The establishment of a RAA leadership structure with three Service Managers, each leading in at least one geographical area but also leading across South Yorkshire on one of the three key areas of adoption work - Recruitment and Assessment, Family-finding and Adoption Support in September 2022 has enabled the RAA to start moving forward in all these key areas of development.

The appointment of the data analyst in March 2022 and then the Business Manager in August 2022 have also helped the RAA to start to understand much better its areas of strength and those areas which need further development or support. Developments planned for 23-24 will continue to build on what we have learned so far.



Despite the lifting of final covid restrictions in February 2022 we continue to be affected by the impact of the successive lockdowns. Practitioners are returning to working in the office but working patterns have changed significantly. The numbers of children where adoption is the plan remained lower in 22-23 than pre-pandemic and the number of potential new adopters coming forward also remained significantly lower. Although the numbers of both children and adopters seem to have been picking up since December 2022 there is still much to do. In 2023-24 we will be introducing our new case management system so that we can all work together on the same system wherever we are based in South Yorkshire.

We will ensure that potential adopters are supported on their journey in a consistent way from the earliest moment wherever and however they contact One Adoption South Yorkshire and that we recruit adopters to match the needs of the children who need families. We will ensure that children are placed in secure, loving and stable placements at the earliest opportunity and do not remain unnecessarily with short-term carers. We will continue to develop our adoption support services, in conjunction with partner agencies across South Yorkshire, to ensure that adoptive families thrive.

The coming year - 2023-24 is the final year in our initial three-year development plan and our intention is that by the end of March 2024 we will have all the structures and resources in place to take us through to becoming the outstanding Regional Adoption Agency we intend to be and South Yorkshire needs.

## **STEPHANIE EVANS**

Head of One Adoption South Yorkshire



# OASY STRUCTURE

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One Adoption South Yorkshire was the thirtieth Regional Adoption Agency created in England and is a partnership model RAA. It brings together the Adoption Services from Doncaster Children's Trust, now Doncaster City Council, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, Sheffield City Council and Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Doncaster is the 'host' agency but in a partnership model, practitioners do not all move to the host agency either through secondment or TUPE. They remain employed by their existing agency. Doncaster hosts a small but growing team of central 'hub' staff who operate across the whole service. Unlike many other partnership model RAAs One Adoption South Yorkshire has a pooled budget. Some of the budget remains with each locality to cover staffing, direct payments to adopters and other local expenses, the remainder is held by Doncaster and covers inter- agency payments, commissioned contracts and other RAA-wide expenses.





## Team structures April 2023

Locality	Service Manger	Team Manager	Advanced Practitioner	Panel-Advisers	Recruitment Team	Family Finding Team	Adoption Support Team	Business Support
Barnsley	0.5 FTE (Hub Based, Family-finding lead)	1 FTE	1 FTE	0.4 FTE (Based Sheffield)	<b>4.5 FTE Social Workers</b> 6.5FTE working across recruitment and family finding	<b>2 FTE Social Workers</b> 6.5FTE working across recruitment and family finding	<b>2 FTE Social Workers</b> 0.8FTE Development/letterbox coordinator	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0 FTE Business Support Officer
Doncaster	1 FTE (Recruitment and Assessment lead)	1 FTE	1 FTE	0.6 FTE (Based Doncaster)	<b>3.45 FTE Social Workers</b> 0.5 Social Work Assistant	<b>1.65 FTE Social Workers</b>	<b>3.2 FTE Social Workers</b> 2.5FTE Social Work Assistants (Including letter-box co-ordinator) 0.5FTE Education Support worker	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0 FTE Business Support Officer
Rotherham	0.5 FTE (Hub Based, Family-finding lead)	2 FTE	0 FTE	0.4 FTE (Based Doncaster)	<b>5.7 FTE Social Workers</b>	<b>2.2 FTE Social Workers</b> 1FTE Social Work Assistant	<b>2.0 FTE Social Worker</b> 1 FTE Social Work Assistant (Including letter-box coordinator)	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.0FTE Business Support Officer
Sheffield	1 FTE (Adoption Support lead)	2.5 FTE	0 FTE	0.6 FTE (Based Sheffield)	<b>6.5 FTE Social Workers</b> 0.6FTE Interviewing officer	<b>3.2 FTE Social Workers</b>	<b>4.4 FTE Social Workers</b> 2 FTE Social Work Assistant 1FTE Letter-box co-ordinator	0.5 FTE Panel Business Support 1.5 FTE Business Support Officer

**Head of Service** – Stephanie Evans, employed by Doncaster and based in Doncaster.

### **Service Managers**

Vicky Brooke – Full-time based in Sheffield, RAA lead on Adoption Support

Helen Mangham – currently on a 12-month full-time contract. Manages the Rotherham and Barnsley teams and RAA lead on Family-Finding. Employed by Doncaster but based across the teams in Barnsley and Rotherham

Michael Richardson – currently on a 12-month full-time contract based in Doncaster, RAA lead on Recruitment and Family-finding

### **Team Managers**

Jayne Haywood – Acting Full-time Team Manager in Barnsley

Melanie Johnson – Full-time Team Manager in Doncaster

Jill Stanley – Full-time Team Manager in Rotherham

Wendy Caster – Acting Full-time Team Manager in Rotherham

Jane Sandland – Full-time Team Manager for Recruitment and Assessment in Sheffield

Liz Rowe – Part-time Team Manager for family-finding in Sheffield

Laura Williams – Part-time Team Manager for Adoption Support in Sheffield

### **Advanced Practitioners**

Ellen Holliday – Full-time Adoption Support Lead in Doncaster

Katie Clarke – Acting Advanced Practitioner in Barnsley

### **Agency-Advisers**

Agency Adviser East (Doncaster and Rotherham) – Kim Wilson.

Agency Adviser West (Barnsley and Sheffield) – Samantha Jones.

### **Panel Chairs**

Panel Chair East – Michaela Bass

Panel Chair West – Viv Howorth





# OASY GOVERNANCE

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## **OASY Governance Board – currently meets bi-monthly**

Riana Nelson, Director of Children, Young People and Families –  
Doncaster City Council – Chair

Director of Children’s Services- Rotherham Metropolitan Borough  
Council

Assistant Director, Children in Care, Sheffield City Council

Director of Children’s Services – Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Director of Children’s Social Care – Doncaster City Council

Adoption-UK – South Yorkshire Adopter Voice representative

Virtual Head – Doncaster City Council

Yorkshire Adoption Agency – Voluntary Adoption Agency Representative

Head of Children’s Alliance – South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board





# PERFORMANCE

Performance data is collected both for the individual authorities and for the RAA as a whole and is split between the adopter data and the children's data. At the present time the RAA is able to produce reliable data based on the requirements of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, now just the Adoption and Special Guardianship data but there are some areas of data collection, particularly around post adoption support and the stability of adoptive families which still need further development. The introduction of a single case management system for the whole South Yorkshire service to meet the needs of an adoption agency which is planned for 23/24 should enable the service to produce all the required data in the future.

## Adopter Data

National Adoption Regulations have specific expectations regarding the length of each element of the journey to approval for adopters. Stage 1 - Should be completed within 2 months and Stage 2 - Should be completed within 4 months.

### Numbers at stage one - 22-23 compared with 21-22

#### 1. No. at Stage 1 (Start date and no end date)

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	8	4	4	5	8	7	4	5	5	6	7	8
Doncaster	15	12	12	14	8	7	5	7	6	6	4	6
Rotherham	9	4	5	7	7	7	8	7	8	8	8	3
Sheffield	3	4	4	4	2	3	5	5	7	10	13	11
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>

#### No. at Stage 1 (Start date and no end date)

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
Barnsley	9	6	6	5	4	5	7	8	8	7	8	7
Doncaster	6	7	7	5	5	5	7	8	10	12	17	17
Rotherham	5	3	8	9	7	7	2	2	4	5	6	8
Sheffield	7	8	7	5	9	9	7	7	6	3	3	3
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>

Numbers at stage one remain broadly consistent over the last 2 years with some teams seeing higher numbers for some periods but over the period numbers even out across the teams. In 22/23 what has been most noticeable has been the number of potential adopters dropping out at stage 1.

Adopters who withdrew from the process before stage 2 started	
Barnsley	7
Doncaster	6
Rotherham	8
Sheffield	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>

This is an unprecedented number of adopters dropping out of the process after submitting a Registration of Interest but before the full assessment process has begun. Many adopters dropping out have cited concerns about the cost-of-living crisis and the impact on their finances meaning that they did not feel that the time was right for them to be starting a family.

During the pandemic temporary adjustments were made to the regulations regarding the checks and particularly the medical checks required at stage 1 prior to the commencement of the full assessment at stage 2. These adjustments enabled adoption services to begin the stage 2 assessment before the medical checks were completed. These adjustments have now been withdrawn. But what we are finding, in common with RAAs across the country, is that local GPs are increasingly reluctant to undertake the medical assessments, citing the increased workload post pandemic and the fact that these medicals are not intrinsic to the national GP contract. Letters have been written to the National College of GPs at national level but we are still negotiating at local level to get prospective adopters an appropriate medical report provided by someone who knows them well. The recent Serious Case Review regarding the death of a child placed for adoption has drawn attention to the importance of an accurate and detailed medical assessment.

**2. No. at Stage 2 (start date and no end date)**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	7	6	6	6	4	3	5	4	4	6	6
Doncaster	9	8	8	10	8	7	8	5	6	5	6	5
Rotherham	4	3	5	3	3	3	1	2	2	2	3	6
Sheffield	7	4	2	1	4	5	4	5	6	6	5	5
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>22</b>

**No. at Stage 2 (start date and no end date)**

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22
Barnsley	10	12	9	5	6	6	4	1	2	4	5	6
Doncaster	7	9	8	11	8	7	9	6	7	6	7	7
Rotherham	11	12	9	8	5	3	5	7	7	8	6	6
Sheffield	8	11	9	9	10	6	8	12	10	9	8	8
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>

Stage 2 is the period during which the full assessment of potential adopters is undertaken by a qualified and experienced social worker. As can be seen from the tables above there was a substantial drop in overall numbers by the end of 2021/22 and this continued into 2022/23 with the biggest decline in the autumn of 22/23. This would tie in with the decline in enquiries and the number of withdrawals at stage 1 highlighted earlier. This would seem to be linked to the cost-of-living crisis and the political uncertainties of last year. But there are also suggestions nationally that potential adopters may be aware of the drop in the number of children where adoption is the plan during the pandemic, and this is having an impact on them coming forward.

The number of enquiries has started to pick up again from January 2023 and with the combined numbers at stage 1 and stage 2 we are expecting to approve a similar number of adopters by September 2023 as we approved in the whole of 22/23.

**4. No. of enquiries in month**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	6	4	5	4	4	11	3	4	4	4	3
Doncaster	1	4	8	4	2	2	4	4	3	12	7	6
Rotherham	3	3	6	5	2	2	2	7	4	5	5	10
Sheffield	10	12	11	8	8	8	11	10	10	12	17	15
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>

**Overall number of adopters approved 22/23****5. No. of Adopters Approved in month**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	1	1	3	0	1	2	3	1	2	0	0	1	15
Doncaster	0	4	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	19
Rotherham	2	1	1	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	11
Sheffield	1	2	3	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	12
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>57</b>

**Overall number of adopters approved 22/23****No. of Adopters Approved**

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	2	1	3	3	2	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	17
Doncaster	0	0	3	0	4	2	1	3	1	2	0	1	17
Rotherham	2	1	3	2	2	4	0	0	2	4	0	0	20
Sheffield	3	0	3	3	0	4	1	1	3	1	2	4	25
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>79</b>

The target set in the original business case for the SYRAA was 92 adopters per year. In 2021/22 and again in 2022/23 the RAA output is below the set target and there is a marked sudden decline in performance from 2020/21 when the target was exceeded. The reasons are likely to be as outlined above with some adopters dropping out of the process and others not coming forward due to the circumstances around the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis which has impacted on family finances.



The challenge facing One Adoption South Yorkshire is to return to previous high levels of performance in respect of adopter recruitment but also to recruit more adopters who can meet the specific needs of the current children who need families. This means recruiting more adopters who could provide a home for older children, for brothers and sisters together, for children with complex health needs and for children with a more diverse cultural heritage. The Service has begun to do this since coming together as a RAA with recent national and local campaigns for adopters for older children and sibling groups. Practitioners have been working with adopters and local communities to try to spread the message that adoption can be for people from all backgrounds.

The service is connecting with faith groups and with people employed in the caring professions who may feel able to adopt older children and children with complex health needs. The RAA is currently exploring with local colleagues in Fostering Services, colleagues in the other 'One Adoption' RAAs and local VAAs, the possibility of developing a 'concurrent planning' service where parents are dually assessed as both foster carers and adopters with the understanding that the initial plan is to return the children to birth parents or their extended family but if this proves impossible the children would be adopted by the concurrent carers.

Despite the decrease in the number of adopters approved in 22-23 South Yorkshire still has an excess of adopters over children, although this excess is declining rapidly as more children are starting to come through from the children's teams needing adoptive families





## Children's data

There are national targets for the completion of certain stages in the child's journey from coming into the care of the local authority to an Adoption Order being made and their becoming a permanent member of their new family. Since the beginning of the pandemic these targets have become impossible to achieve due to the inevitable delays in planning for children, delays in court proceedings and then low priority being given to the making of the final adoption order once the child is placed for adoption. The Somerset judgment, which led to delays across the country in early 2022 as local authorities reviewed their practice in respect of available medical reports at the point of the 'Should be Adopted' decision, has also had a significant impact on the timeliness figures.

At national level questions are being asked about the usefulness of the adoption timeliness targets and in particular the usefulness of the 3-year scorecards which showed adoption trends in local authorities but were at least 12 months out of date by the time local authorities received them. All RAAs are now able to consider their individual data on a month-by-month basis and Coram-BAAF provide aggregated data on a quarterly basis.

The A1 indicator is the length of time between a child coming into care and being placed with their adoptive family. The target time is 426 days.

### 8. Average time from entering care to being placed (A1 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 22_23	Qtr 2 22_23	Qtr 3 22_23	Qtr 4 22_23	Full Year
Barnsley	557.3	497.6	663.0	688.7	542.5
Doncaster	369.5	590.8	646.2	508.5	578.1
Rotherham	522.0	584.0	701.0	-	594.8
Sheffield	352.8	482.6	455.3	486.8	428.4
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>480.9</b>	<b>541.2</b>	<b>620.1</b>	<b>532.6</b>	<b>540.1</b>

The table shows the average length of time for the children adopted by each team in 22-23. As these are all children, where the Adoption Order has been made these will mostly be children placed for adoption in 21/22





### 9. Average time from Entering Care to being placed (A1 indicator)(for those children adopted) by Age at Adoption

	Under 1	1-4	5-9	10-15	16+	Full Year
Barnsley	-	543.2	685.7	-	-	542.5
Doncaster	-	559.9	472.5	-	-	578.1
Rotherham	-	545.6	863.5	-	-	594.8
Sheffield	189.3	471.5	639.5	-	-	428.4
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	189.3	531.3	703.2	-	-	540.1

This table shows the impact of age on waiting times for children.

If the service were only placing children under one year old, the national target would easily be achieved. For many children under a year old adopters are more readily available, many are placed subject to an early permanence placement where the adopters are dually approved as foster carers, and the children are placed with them before the court has made a Placement Order. Care proceedings have always taken longer than required and the 26-week target was rarely achieved before the pandemic. In the last three years care proceedings have taken longer and longer meaning that unless the child is placed in an Early Permanence Placement before the Placement Order is made, they are becoming older and older at the point of placement with their adoption family. Older children always take longer to find suitable families but the impact on the timeliness figures of finding a suitable placement for older children should not mean that the service ceases family finding for older children.

South Yorkshire courts have recently issued an announcement of their intention to get care proceedings back within the 26-week limit. This would bring considerable benefits both to children in early permanence placements as well as children waiting for permanent parents in foster care. Although a child in an early permanence placement does not need to make a further move to their adoptive family, until the adoption order is made there remains the possibility that the child may have to leave the foster carer/adopter and return to their birth family. In such circumstances the move becomes more traumatic for all concerned the longer the child has remained with the foster carer/adopter without a decision being made.



To adjust for the practice of some older children being adopted at a later stage often by their previous foster carers the National Targets have a relatively new indicator – A10.

On this indicator two of the four locality teams are under the national target, but the RAA overall exceeds the target by 44 days.

**10. Average time from entering care to moving in with adoptive family (adjusted for FFA) (A10 Indicator) (adoption order date within quarter)**

	Qtr 1 22 23	Qtr 2 22 23	Qtr 3 22 23	Qtr 4 22 23	Full Year
Barnsley	465.3	295.8	663.0	494.7	415.3
Doncaster	326.0	417.8	545.2	463.9	452.7
Rotherham	523.0	504.6	701.0	-	546.8
Sheffield	277.2	453.6	455.3	406.0	391.1
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>426.5</b>	<b>418.0</b>	<b>588.5</b>	<b>448.9</b>	<b>460.2</b>

This target is not one the RAA can deliver against as a single service. The achievement of this goal, to place children as quickly as possible with permanent families, is a shared activity involving colleagues in Children’s Services making assessments and plans and implementing them as promptly as possible and the Courts ensuring that decision- making is prompt in the interests of the child. As detailed above in the last three years there has been considerable delay in care proceedings and in setting dates for hearings because of the Covid crisis. Despite the recent pronouncement from the Sheffield Courts and efforts being made to get care proceedings back within the 26 week target we still have some children to place where care proceedings have continued for more than three years. In most cases these are children who are placed in early permanence placements so the finalisation of the placement order should not result in a further move for the child, but the Early Permanence carers have been living with a level of uncertainty for several years.





## 12. Average time from Placement Order to Matching (A2 Indicator) (for those children adopted)

	Qtr 1 22 23	Qtr 2 22 23	Qtr 3 22 23	Qtr 4 22 23	YTD
Barnsley	64.0	88.0	264.0	145.3	88.7
Doncaster	91.0	220.7	322.4	192.6	239.8
Rotherham	207.6	217.2	237.5	-	210.4
Sheffield	59.8	133.4	189.5	145.5	123.1
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>113.4</b>	<b>171.5</b>	<b>253.7</b>	<b>167.6</b>	<b>170.7</b>

The National A2 indicator is one where the main responsibility for achieving this target lies with the RAA. The speed with which this is achieved depends on the early allocation of a family-finder and the availability of adopters to meet the needs of the child. If the child is allocated early enough to a family-finder and if there are suitable adopters available, the target of 121 days is easily achieved. For older children, sibling groups and for children with complex health needs adopters are not always immediately available and there has to be more lengthy searches both across the RAA's own resources and even nationally, involving adopters from other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. Sometimes unnecessary delays can occur at the stage where a case is transferred from one children's social worker to another or where there are a number of possible adopters and there are delays around making a choice of where to place a child. Close and effective working with colleagues in the Children's Teams can speed up the process for a child.

Again, this table shows the data for children already adopted so it reflects activity from back in 2021/22 or even 2020/21 at the height of the pandemic when all activity was delayed and opportunities for early working with colleagues in the children's teams were more constrained.

**1. No. of Adoption orders in month**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	3	4	1	3	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	16
Doncaster	1	0	1	1	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	3	21
Rotherham	4	1	3	4	1	0	3	2	1	0	0	0	19
Sheffield	1	2	2	2	3	0	1	2	1	1	5	0	20
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>76</b>

**No. of Adoptions**

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	8	7	3	1	1	3	2	1	0	1	1	3	31
Doncaster	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	3	9
Rotherham	3	5	1	1	4	3	2	1	1	4	0	8	33
Sheffield	4	6	9	5	1	0	3	1	0	6	3	4	42
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>115</b>

The number of children adopted in 2021/22 compared favourably with numbers in pre-pandemic years. However, the number in 2022/23 shows a significant decline, possibly reflecting a reduction in activity during the pandemic.

The number of adoptions in a given year usually reflects activity by an adoption service in the previous year to eighteen months. As Adoption Orders are usually made some months after the child is placed. During the pandemic there were periods when the Courts greatly reduced the making of Adoption Orders as these were seen as non-essential work. At other points during the pandemic there were flurries of activity as the Courts got back to something like normal for a brief period as is seen in May 2021 and March 2022

The first table mostly reflects RAA activity in 21/22, the first year of the RAA and a period of significant lockdowns. The second reflects activity in the previous year 20/21 which although it had even more significant lockdowns probably included the adoptions of many children where the proceedings had taken place pre-pandemic.

The RAA placed all the children it was asked to place but in that first year of operation the number of children with plans for adoption was very low and where children did have plans for adoption this was often changed to either return to family or even long-term fostering.

Current Activity by the RAA is more accurately reflected in the following tables showing the number of children 'placed' for adoption.

**19. Children who were placed during month (includes those later Adopted or no longer placed)**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	2	10
Doncaster	4	1	1	1	4	0	0	1	3	0	0	2	17
Rotherham	5	1	0	0	2	3	2	2	1	4	0	2	22
Sheffield	3	2	1	3	2	0	3	6	1	1	4	0	26
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>75</b>

**Children who were placed during (includes those later Adopted or no longer placed)**

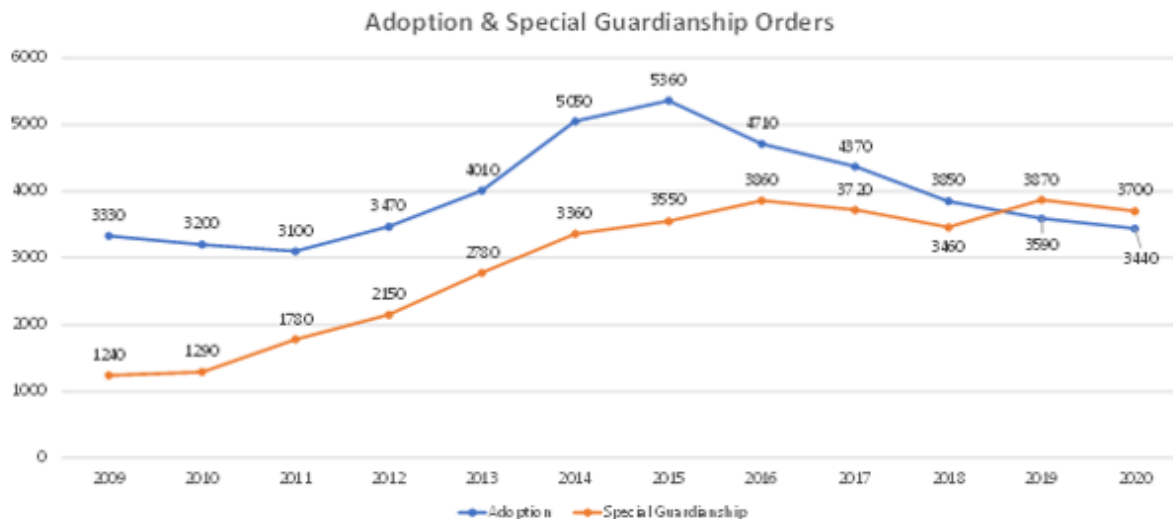
	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	1	1	1	3	3	2	0	4	0	0	3	1	19
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	14
Rotherham	3	3	3	0	4	2	0	6	0	1	0	0	22
Sheffield	5	1	6	1	2	2	2	2	0	1	1	3	26
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>81</b>

This table shows a reduction in adoption activity across all four local authorities in 2021/22 and again in 22/23. However, during this period there were also a significant number of children placed with EPP carers who will ultimately be added to the children placed for adoption figures.

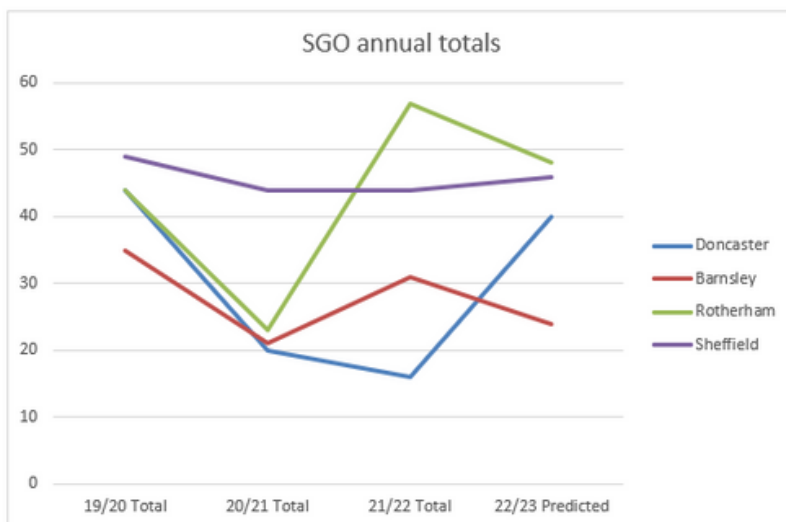
**18. No. who are currently placed FFA as at end of month**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23
Barnsley	4	4	4	4	4	8	7	7	8	6	6	7
Doncaster	5	7	8	10	6	6	6	6	4	5	5	4
Rotherham	4	3	3	6	5	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
Sheffield	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>

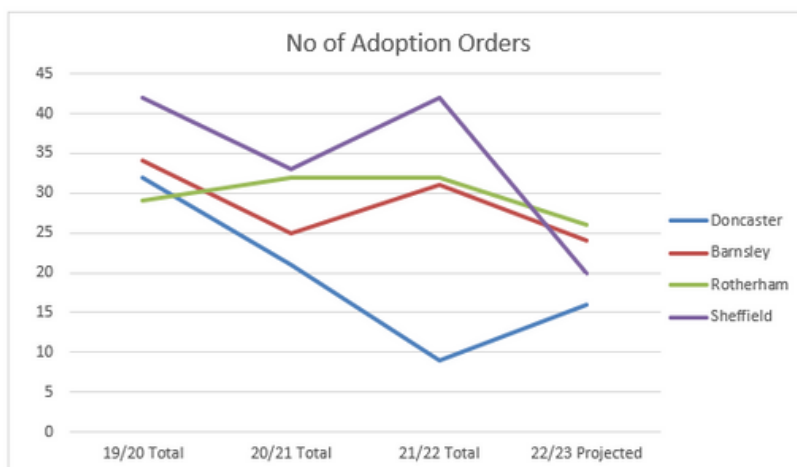
A reduction in adoption activity has been shown right across England and Wales over the last three years. At this point any explanations for this can be only speculative. Covid and the delays in the Courts, including the delays linked to the Somerset judgement are believed to be a significant feature as this has slowed down the adoption process right across the country. Many children have ultimately either been placed with relatives following lengthy assessments or have remained in care for so long that they are now considered too old to be adopted and are likely to remain in long-term foster care. More children are now being placed subject to Special Guardianship Orders rather than Adoption Orders, the crossover point came at the end of 2018. However, in the last two years under Covid there has been a decline in the number of both SGOs and Adoption Orders being made. This is believed to be due to the reduction in Court activity. (See graph below)



John Simmonds, Coram-Baaf for the Public Law Working Group Jan 2022



These graphs show local activity in recent years in respect of both SGOs and Adoption Orders and indicate significant variation across the four LAs and also significant highs and lows in the number of both.



National data would suggest that the percentage of Permanence Orders made is currently around 57% SGOs and 43% Adoption Orders but the overall number made each year of both has dropped since the start of the Pandemic. The concern is

that children have been remaining in care due to the delays in the courts and the challenges to services in progressing care plans during the period of the pandemic.

The original Business Case for One Adoption South Yorkshire set a target of 154 children adopted per year, although this was a relatively arbitrary figure, based on levels of adoption across South Yorkshire in previous years including a 'stretch' target. The RAA can only find placements for the children the local authorities ask it to find placements for, so together we need to explore whether the recent downturn in numbers reflects a permanent change in practice or is just a reflection of the impact of the recent pandemic or other temporary factors. For 23/24 this target has been reviewed to 120 children adopted each year. This seems to be more realistic and more in line with recent requirements. Given the number of children 'placed' in 22/23 this is unlikely to be achieved in 23/24 as children adopted but is reasonable target for children 'placed for adoption' within the year. At the time of writing this report in June 2023 there is a real indication that the number of children placed is likely to be significantly higher than the previous two years.

Central to the ethos of One Adoption South Yorkshire is the aim of placing South Yorkshire children with South Yorkshire Families. The rationale for this being that by placing local children with the RAA's own adopters, practitioners know both the children and the families well and can be more confident that good matches are being made. If children are placed with local families, the RAA is in a much better position to support those families into the future and ensure that the child remains secure within that family. The current legal requirement is that the placing authority provides adoption support to the family for the first three years. Post placement, if the RAA has placed a South Yorkshire child anywhere in England or Wales, this could result in practitioners travelling long distances to support families, who will not have the knowledge about local facilities and services that they would need to be able to provide useful advice and support. Furthermore, support for local children's sense of identity can be better provided by maintaining them within familiar communities rather than placing them very far away from 'home' and in what can be an unfamiliar environment in terms of sound, smell and feel.





**20. Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or no longer |**

	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Total
Barnsley	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	1	9
Doncaster	3	1	0	1	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	11
Rotherham	3	1	0	0	2	3	2	2	1	4	0	2	20
Sheffield	2	2	0	3	3	0	3	1	1	0	1	1	17
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>57</b>
% Barnsley	-	100%	100%	100%	-	100%	100%	-	-	100%	-	50%	90%
%Doncaster	75%	100%	0%	100%	50%	-	-	0%	67%	-	-	100%	65%
%Rotherham	60%	100%	-	-	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	-	100%	91%
%Sheffield	67%	100%	0%	100%	150%	-	100%	17%	100%	0%	25%	-	65%
<b>% One Adoption SY</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>76%</b>

**Children who were placed from within the RAA (includes those later Adopted or no**

	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Total
Barnsley	1	0	1	3	2	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	14
Doncaster	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	0	0	8
Rotherham	3	3	1	0	2	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	16
Sheffield	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	1	0	1	0	3	15
<b>One Adoption SY</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>53</b>
% Barnsley	100%	0%	100%	100%	67%	0%	-	100%	-	-	100%	0%	74%
%Doncaster	100%	-	100%	-	100%	50%	0%	50%	100%	100%	0%	0%	57%
%Rotherham	100%	100%	33%	-	50%	50%	-	100%	-	0%	-	-	73%
%Sheffield	20%	100%	17%	100%	100%	100%	100%	50%	-	100%	0%	100%	58%
<b>% One Adoption SY</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>65%</b>

The table for 2022/23 shows a significant increase in the percentage of children being placed within the RAA, up 24% from the first year 20/21 when most of the activity took place pre-RAA and only 52% of children were placed within South Yorkshire. In 22/23 76% of children were placed with South Yorkshire families. Although with 24% placed externally the RAA is still some way from where we would want to be.

As an adoption agency we would never want to insist that all children are placed with RAA adopters as there always has to be the consideration of the needs of the child and the avoidance of delay. If the right adopter at the right time happens to live elsewhere in the country, we would still make the placement with the external adopters. But at the present time a number of children are placed externally because there are no adopters who could take a sibling placement or have the required cultural background to support a child's identity needs within South Yorkshire. Over time, the RAA will seek to ensure that it is able to provide such placements in- house wherever possible. South Yorkshire is a large conurbation of 1.4 million people, from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures and if suitable adopters can be found anywhere in the country, we ought to be able to find them here.

In terms of disrupted adoptions, that is placements, which have ended before the Adoption Order is made, OASY had only one disruption in 2022/23. Disruptions are very difficult for everyone involved but are thankfully very rare. Lessons can be learned but often the circumstances are quite specific and relate to the characteristics of the individuals involved and how they relate or do not relate to each other.

As we develop as a Regional Adoption Agency and especially once we have the new case management system which will focus specifically on adoption practice, we would like to start to gather information on adoptions where the child leaves home early, that is before they reach 18 years. We would want to use this information to improve practice in all three areas of adoption practice in recruitment and assessment, matching and adoption support to ensure that adoptive families thrive, and children don't leave home early. At the moment some of this information may be known to colleagues in other services, such as the Safeguarding Services who might be asked to find foster carers or a residential placement following an adoptive family breakdown but there are no existing systems for collating this information across the four authorities and no opportunities for all services to consider the learning and improve practice.

Back in 2021/22 as part of the first-year service development all staff within One Adoption South Yorkshire service received specific transition training from the University of East Anglia based on research they had been undertaking in respect of making good transitions for children from foster carers to adoptive parents using the Secure Base model. This is the model currently employed in South Yorkshire for all children transitioning to their adoptive families and we intend to continue to deliver the training to colleagues in the Safeguarding Teams, the Children in Care teams and Fostering Teams and foster carers to ensure that all services are working together in the best interests of children.





# FINANCE

The South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency was created under a Section 101 agreement on the 1st January 2021.

The four partners who signed up to the agreement are Doncaster City Council (Lead Authority), Sheffield City Council, Barnsley MBC and Rotherham MBC.

The 2022/23 annual combined budget is £5.172m, of which £952k relates to interagency payments. £270k carry forward from 2021/22 was approved by The Board in March 22. Details of budget, spend and carry forward are set out below:

<b>South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency (SYRAA)</b>	<b>2022/23 £000</b>
Rotherham RMBC	1276
Sheffield CC	1680
Barnsley MBC	1008
Doncaster CDC	1208
2021/22 Underspend Retained	270
<b>Total Gross Income</b>	<b>5442</b>
Capital Expenditure	0
Revenue Expenditure	4503
<b>Total Gross Expenditure</b>	<b>4503</b>
<b>Underspend</b>	<b>938</b>
<b>Underspend Retained for 2023/24</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>Balance Reimbursed to Partners Pro-Rate to Original Contributions</b>	<b>621</b>

The Board agreed at the March 2023 meeting to rollover £317K of the 2022/23 underspend to provide for a new case management system (£100k), additional interagency placements (£150k), adopter training (£42k) and a 0.5fte Communications and Marketing Officer (£25k). The remaining portion of the 2022/23 underspend (£621k) is to be returned to the partner authorities as a one-off payment pro-rata to the original contributions.

Approval for 2023/24 from The Board was also agreed for an additional £20k towards the Adopter Engagement Contract and £2.5k to be passported from each LA towards a central training budget. Changes in RAA staffing had previously been agreed by the Board to take into account the development needs of the new service.

Posts agreed in 2022/23 included a 12-month Service Manager (Barnsley/Rotherham), 2 Agency Advisor posts, a 12-month Advanced Practitioner, a Clinical Psychologist, a Business Manager and an additional Adoption Support Post based at Barnsley. All these posts are funded from the original agreed budget due to the reduction in the number of inter-agency placements required.

In March 2023 the Board agreed to the 12-month Service Manager post becoming permanent and to the 12-month Advanced Practitioner post, which was only appointed to in January 23 continuing to January 2024 and then being reviewed.



## Adoption Support Fund

The funding provided by the Department of Education through the Adoption Support Fund has become a significant aspect of the Adoption Support service provided by RAAs across England and Wales and One Adoption South Yorkshire is no exception.

### APPLICATION NUMBERS 22/23

	Claims	Remittance	Total
<b>Barnsley</b>	70	25	95
<b>Doncaster</b>	84	20	104
<b>Rotherham</b>	78	30	108
<b>Sheffield</b>	116	9	125
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>432</b>

### £ AMOUNT APPLIED FOR

	Claims	Remittance	Total
<b>Barnsley</b>	£197,208.79	£110,461.29	£307,670.08
<b>Doncaster</b>	£307,717.29	£78,717.50	£386,434.79
<b>Rotherham</b>	£269,515.05	£142,194.25	£411,709.30
<b>Sheffield</b>	£460,603.71	£37,964.86	£498,974.60
<b>TOTAL £ AMOUNT APPLIED FOR</b>	<b>£1,235,044.87</b>	<b>£369,337.90</b>	<b>£1604,382.77</b>

### CLAIMED AGAINST APPLICATIONS 22/23

	Claims	Remittances	Total
<b>Barnsley</b>	£185,978.43	£86,420.86	£272,399.29
<b>Doncaster</b>	£261,276.35	£68,758.96	£330,035.31
<b>Rotherham</b>	£231,244.13	£113,098.00	£344,342.13
<b>Sheffield</b>	£387,299.23	£37,399.86	£424,699.09
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT CLAIMED AGAINST APPLICATIONS</b>	<b>£1,065,798.14</b>	<b>£305,677.68</b>	<b>£1,371,475.82</b>

## SURRENDERED FUNDS

	Claims	Remittances	Total
<b>Barnsley</b>	£28,531.50	£20,040.43	£59,571.93
<b>Doncaster</b>	£45,440.94	£9,258.54	£63,399.48
<b>Rotherham</b>	£33,770.92	£23,296.25	£72,867.17
<b>Sheffield</b>	£71,809.34	£565.00	£83,675.51
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT SURRENDERED</b>	<b>£179,552.70</b>	<b>£53,160.22</b>	<b>£232,712.92</b>

The funding from the ASF is not a grant to the agency. Each application is specifically linked to a child and a provider. The funding comes from the Department of Education and must be used on the specific agreed intervention. If the funding is not fully used any unspent funds must be returned to the DofE. As of 1 April 2021, the RAA become the administrator for the ASF across all four teams and the funding is now paid directly to Doncaster City Council and the central business support worker pays all the provider invoices and oversees the claiming and surrendering of funds. As can be seen above the amounts involved are substantial and are increasing every year.

The number of applications relates to individual children and each adopted child is entitled to apply for up to £5000 in therapeutic support each year. A substantial portion of the Adoption Social Workers' time is spent applying for commissioning and monitoring these funds.



# ADOPTION SUPPORT

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Adoption support is a key developmental area for the South Yorkshire RAA and for all RAAs. An adoption does not end with the adoption order and the commitment of the South Yorkshire RAA is to be there for our adopter families throughout the years as their children grow and become young adults, ensuring that our children grow to adulthood in secure and stable families and achieve their full potential.

At the point of the One Adoption South Yorkshire 'go live' in January 2021 the teams were all in very different places in respect of adoption support. Sheffield and Doncaster had small-dedicated teams, Barnsley had one full-time worker equivalent and Rotherham had one full-time worker who had just transferred across from the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. Each authority had a different approach to grant and expenses for adopters and post adoption training.

Initial meetings with adopters in 21/22 established that adoption support was their number one priority. It also became clear that some of the support they were expecting needed to come from partner agencies, particularly Education and Health and couldn't be provided by the adoption support teams alone. While the Adoption Support teams had a key signposting and co-ordination role, they were not the key deliverers of some post adoption services.

As a result, adoption support development for One Adoption South Yorkshire has concentrated on two main themes:

Firstly, consistent support to adopters in the early stages after a child joins their family. The Initial Support Offer for all new adopters has been implemented across the RAA from April 2022. This offer includes the identification of an assessor as the key point of contact in the first-year post order to ensure that adopters feel they can contact someone they know if they have any issues or want to enquire about support of any kind. The offer includes one-year's



membership of Adoption-UK and the Institute of Therapeutic Parenting, link with a peer mentor and access to any of the support groups, post adoption training or activities provided for adoptive families. Initial grants are also available to adopters where children may have additional needs such as when two or more children join a family at the same time.

Adoption Allowances are not the responsibility of the RAA, but OASY has adopted a consistent approach in terms of recommending adoption allowances for adopters in specific circumstances consistent with the criteria for initial grants. In 22/23 we have undertaken further work with the decision-makers across the four local authorities and we are confident that a shared South Yorkshire policy in respect of adoption allowances will be available in 2023.

The aim of the initial offer is to ensure that all South Yorkshire adopters are properly supported in the initial stages of family-building and that they become a part of a South Yorkshire adopting community where they can feel supported by practitioners, fellow adopters and partner agencies across the Region throughout their children's childhood and into early adulthood.

Secondly, the RAA is working with adopters and partners to develop the provision of multi-disciplinary support to adoptive families.

In 22/23 the adoption support teams were re-configured to ensure that there were no teams with only one adoption support worker. Sheffield and Doncaster have small teams of post adoption workers, one led by a part-time team manager and one by an Advanced Practitioner; Barnsley and Rotherham each have two workers. In Rotherham we have been able to re-configure the responsibilities of the two team managers to ensure that there is an Adoption Support lead but in Barnsley the single team manager is responsible for the full range of adoption activity. It will be an aim in 23/24 to ensure that each locality has a dedicated lead on adoption support.

Since the creation of the Adoption Support Fund in 2015 the main task for all Adoption Support workers has been to complete applications to this central





government fund commissioned external services to deliver specific pieces of therapeutic work with individual children and families. Most adoption support workers have caseloads of between forty and seventy families and as a result they have limited capacity for other work beside ASF applications. Nevertheless, the vision of adoption support for South Yorkshire is to broaden the offer away from just ASF applications. OASY adoption support workers will ensure that adopters are able to benefit from peer support, from adopter support groups, from meeting other adopters and being part of an adoption community, from support to negotiate access to other key local services such as education or health assessments. The ASF money will be used for specific, time-limited pieces of therapeutic work to meet a specific assessed need.

In 22/23, in addition to the two additional adoption support workers, we have been able to create capacity for a Service Manager to lead across the four teams and together the adoption support service has been able to create a strong offer around post adoption training, adopter support groups in each area and support for adopted young people in each area. The RAA has been able to employ an adopter engagement officer in addition to the Adoption-UK Adopter Voice worker and the adopter engagement officer has been involved in creating WhatsApp groups in each locality to enable faster and more effective communication with and between adopters. In addition, the adopter engagement officer has been able to co-ordinate a series of adopter events and activities which have brought families together and enabled parents to make supportive links but also allowed adopted children to meet up and appreciate that their situation is not unique.

*'I wanted to pass on some feedback from a family I am working with. They recently attended the adoption event at Ice Sheffield and they said during the event their young person commented:*

*"I didn't know so many other people were adopted!". They also said she met a few other young people who are adopted from her school, and none where aware of each other. T has come home and said she feels less alone and knows there are other people like her.'*



The RAA has also appointed an Advanced Practitioner for Adoption Support on a twelve-month basis to assist in identifying local adoption support links across the RAA, establishing good working links with partner agencies across all 4 areas and supporting those localities with fewer adoption support workers to develop the groups and local activities adopters need in these areas.

In 22/23 we have:

- Created the adopter engagement post creating capacity to develop communication with adopters through the WhatsApp groups and the RAA Adopter Pages on the website. Create a stunning activity offer throughout the year to being adopters and adopted children together around a series of fun events including football and ice-hockey matches, ice-skating, theatre events and local animal sanctuaries
- Filled The Adopter-Voice post with Adoption-UK in early 2022 and the new worker has established themselves well with local families. This post is about ensuring adopters views are embedded in service development plans and in 22/23 they have been working with adopters in South Yorkshire but also Regionally and Nationally to create a 'toolkit' for adopters around access to services for older adopted young people
- Improved working relationships have been established with the Adoption-UK commissioned service for peer support and peer supporters are increasingly available both for all adopters and more recently specifically for adopters providing early permanence placements
- Finalised the Education Plan for Adopted Children and with the help of local adopters and the 4 local Virtual Heads we have presented it to education colleagues across South Yorkshire with a view to making it a 'live' document for use in schools and other local educational settings from September 2023
- Continued to support the concept of 'trauma-informed' schools to meet the needs of adopted children. Many schools in South Yorkshire would already see themselves as offering a trauma-informed approach but there are still many where this is an unfamiliar concept. We will continue to work with adopters and partner agencies to promote a trauma-informed approach for all adopted children.





- Delivered training sessions for adopters through the Virtual Heads to ensure that adopters can get the best for their children from local education services
- Completed the bid for the FASD project and been successful in obtaining the two-year funding. The RAA is already taking the lead on bringing colleagues together across South Yorkshire to create a South Yorkshire FASD pathway.
- Supported Adopters and Practitioners to meet with leaders of the new Integrated Care Board to begin to devise more effective ways of working together to the benefit of adopted children
- Established Groups for older adopted children in all four locality areas
- RAA Practitioners are being trained to deliver Theraplay, Dyadic Developmental Therapy and Non-Violent Resistance training so that we can offer these services in-house wherever possible.
- The RAA Clinical Psychologist post to assist with the referrals to the ASF and undertake initial specialist assessments has not yet been filled despite our best efforts and we are now exploring other ways of recruiting to this post alongside local partner agencies.

For 23/24 the RAA has created a sub-group of the RAA Governance Board to focus on bringing adopters and services together to consider how adoption support should be delivered.

This sub-group will meet for the first time on 22nd June 2023.



# DEVELOPMENTS IN 22/23

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2022/23 has been a year of consolidation and implementation of developments identified during the first year of operation as a Regional Adoption Agency:

- The work of the Performance Analyst appointed in March 2023 has helped the RAA understand itself better and begin to identify where the information gaps exist. The data from the existing Local Authority case management systems, which is required for the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board, (now just the ASGO data collated by Coram-baaf as the ASGLB ceased to exist in December 2022) is sufficiently reliable to give some guidance around performance in respect of recruitment and placements. However, there is much missing information particularly in respect of Adoption Support that we are still unable to gather from existing systems.
- During 2022/23 a new case management system has been commissioned which will focus entirely on adoption services and will provide appropriate support for practice around adopter recruitment and assessment as well as family-finding and adoption support work. The new system will provide insight into those areas which are currently un-reported and yet are significant areas of work for One Adoption South Yorkshire. These areas are particularly around adoption support but also partner adoptions, access to records for adopted adults and post adoption contact. The new CHARMS system is already used by several other RAAs and will be installed across One Adoption South Yorkshire during 23/24.
- The existing contract for a number of externally commissioned adoption services is due to end in December 2023 so during 22/23 we have been considering how these should be delivered in the future and planning for a new tendering process. These services include access to records for adopted adults and birth families, direct work with birth families and some voice and influence work with adopters and adopted young people.



- There has been ongoing work around the communications and marketing strategy for One Adoption South Yorkshire as the original agreement was for use of the One Adoption Website and access to regional marketing through a commissioned service with Leeds City Council combined with an 'in kind' offer of communication and marketing support specifically within South Yorkshire from each of the four partner authorities. This operation of the in-kind offer has been challenging and not entirely successful in getting the new service the recognition it needs to recruit new adopters and at the last Board meeting in March 2023 it was agreed that OASY would employ a half-time Communications and Marketing Officer on a one-year basis to pilot a more focused approach.
- By August 2022 the three Service Managers were in post and this structure has paid off significantly in that we now have identified leads in each of the three operational areas as well as all 4 geographical areas to bring the 4 teams together to deliver high quality consistent services across the RAA. By June 2023 we are well on the way to delivering fully joined up services and the 2 temporary service manager posts will be recruited to permanently by August 2023.
- Preparation training for adopters had been a joint South Yorkshire undertaking for several years before the RAA came into being, but the RAA is now able to deliver a comprehensive programme of training to adopters at both pre and post adoption levels. The training programme is delivered by practitioners from all 4 teams working together and the RAA is able to ensure a consistent experience wherever an adopter might live in South Yorkshire.
- Adoption Panels across South Yorkshire now operate as RAA Adoption Panels with a consistent approach across all four authorities. There are four panels per month, one based in each local authority and administered by the local business support team and considering a mixture of matches between children and adopters and new adopters for approval. The RAA was established with no central administrative support for Panels as the intention was that each local authority would continue to support their local adoption team with their usual in-house business support offer. This has proved a challenge since becoming a RAA, as we have to provide a consistent service wherever the Panel is taking place and different teams previously had different practices.



- The appointment of the RAA Business Manager in August 2022 has made a significant contribution towards establishing shared procedures and a consistent service which can be replicated across all RAA Panels. The creation of a shared RAA site on TEAMS, which can be accessed by staff from all four authorities has also contributed significantly to more efficient, shared practice South Yorkshire-wide. Practitioners and business support teams can book onto Panels and submit paperwork directly on the Hub without the need for e-mails which can be easily missed or mis-directed. There are now two RAA Panel Chairs, one for the Panels in the West - Barnsley and Sheffield and one for the Panels in the East - Doncaster and Rotherham. The Panels are supported by two RAA Agency Advisers, again one for the West and one for the East. The Agency Decision-maker for decisions around adopter approvals is the RAA Head of Service. The Agency Decision-makers in respect of the children, for 'Should be Adopted' (SHODPA) decisions and matches remain the four ADMS previously identified, one in each partner authority. (The report of the Panel Chairs on Panel activity in 22/23 is attached as an appendix to this Annual Report)
- In 22/23 One Adoption South Yorkshire was part of a pilot project called Letterswap. Link-maker, the organization which provides links between all prospective adopters and all children waiting for families developed and additional on-line module to support virtual contact between adopters and birth families post adoption moving away from the traditional actual letters set-up known as Letter-box. The project was evaluated by the University of East Anglia and is part of the national agenda on developing post adoption contact.
- In 22/23 an application was made for the National Adoption Strategy Centre of Excellence funding to support a South Yorkshire wide Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Project. This application was successful and One Adoption South Yorkshire has two-years of funding to support adopted children and by association children who are not adopted but are affected by FASD across the Region.
- In October 2022 we held an open day for RAA Board members and partners from across South Yorkshire to consider future development for the RAA. The original partnership agreement runs to December 2025 and we are already



half way through the initial term. This is something we will be reviewing over the next two and a half years with recommendations to be made regarding the arrangements from January 2026.

- In March 2023 the second RAA Conference was held with the focus on After Adoption Support. The event involved RAA practitioners, RAA adopters and colleagues and partners from across South Yorkshire coming together to consider the way forward in respect of ongoing support to families after the adoption order is made and especially how we might ensure that contact between adoptive and birth families might become more meaningful than the current letter-box contact. The key-note speech was provided by Professor Julie Selwyn, always an excellent, thoughtful promoter of effective adoption work and there were some very powerful presentations particularly around FASD and work with birth parents and the adopter-led sessions were particularly effective and something we would want to repeat more often.





# Future plans

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Almost all local authorities across England are now part of a Regional Adoption Agency. At the last national up-date, there were only one or two statutory adoption services, which were still part of stand-alone local authorities. The National Adoption Strategy published in July 2021 sees the RAAs at the heart of adoption activity and 2021 saw the creation of a National Strategic Lead for Adoption with a coordinating role to promote best practice across the country. The National Adoption Team is now well established with leads on most areas of adoption practice such as Early Permanence Placements, matching, adoption support and post adoption contact.

One of the key objectives of the Adoption Strategy is speeding up the time it takes to find suitable adopters for children. This is invariably linked to the availability of families for children who are older, are from a minority ethnic or mixed heritage background; need to be placed with brothers or sisters or who have complex health needs. As a RAA, we are engaging with the national drive to reach more diverse communities of adopters who have the skills, abilities and motivation to provide homes for children with more diverse needs. As we emerge from the isolation and restrictions imposed by the pandemic, we are committed to reaching out into our local communities, challenging the beliefs around who can adopt and raising the profile of the kinds of children who need families. We ask all the readers of this Annual Report to assist us with this project and promote adoption for all children who need alternative permanent families wherever and whenever they are able.

Adoption Support will be a key element in increasing people's confidence that they can provide a family for brothers and sisters, for older children and from children with complex needs. Families come in all shapes and sizes and family support comes from a broad range of sources, from appropriate and effective services in the local community, from the extended family of fellow adopters, from the Regional Adoption Agency and its support services from the Adoption Support Fund and from all partner agencies all the way from placement to adulthood.



## Key Developments in 23/24

Final Year in the RAA 3-year development plan – by the end of March 2024 all key structures necessary to support the RAA will be in place:

- The staffing structure will be complete with posts recruited on a permanent basis which will allow post-holders to confidently put plans into action.
- Recruitment and Assessment – ensure consistency of initial response across the RAA, ensure all enquiries are followed up in a timely way – new on-line video to replace information meetings and be followed up by a home visit.
- New part-time communications and recruitment officer to assist teams with recruitment and engaging with local communities who may be new to adoption
- Ensure that we have sufficient adopters with the right skills and experiences to meet the needs of children
- Family-finding – Scoping exercises on Early Permanency and Concurrency are currently underway exploring the possibility of an additional service linked to local fostering services around concurrent placements
- Ensure that we are making the best matches possible for children and supporting those families in the best way possible once the match is made
- Scope our capacity for supporting additional contact between adopters and birth families and how we would work with the Children's Workers to deliver this.
- Adoption Support – OASY is currently exploring the possibility of becoming DDP (Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy) accredited adoption agency. All staff to be trained in DDP by the end of March 2024
- Work to continue with adopters and partner agencies to ensure effective working together across the Regional Adoption Agency and local education, health and children's services to ensure children's needs are met and no child falls between services or is passed between services ineffectively
- Establish the FASD Service for adopted children across South Yorkshire.  
Continue the work with partner agencies to create a South Yorkshire Pathway for FASD open to all affected children and young people.
- Consistent Policy and Procedures covering all 4 teams will be available as RAA policies and procedures on the South Yorkshire Tri-x system from October 2023
- The Hub structure will be complete allowing teams in different localities to work together on booking panels, making inter-agency placements, delivering training to adopters
- The new Case Management system will be in place by April 2024 so the RAA will be able to understand allocations and case-work activity across all four services. Record retention around adoption will be clear for the future.



- There are many areas of adoption practice which the RAA still needs to develop further, some alongside partner agencies:-
- Ongoing support for birth families – the RAA has a contract with PAC-UK to provide some birth family support and there are some areas of good practice across South Yorkshire, some areas have PAUSE projects and others do not. This is an area we need to understand better and work with birth families themselves so that we can make best use of our resources
- Post adoption contact- this is very much an area for further development at national and local level and would involve a culture change across Children’s Services and local courts as well as across the RAA. There are some new projects such as Letter-swap that are already under development but current thinking about the importance of post adoption contact with birth family could initiate major changes right across the sector
- Access to records for adopted adults and other relevant persons. Currently the arrangements are very confusing across the country. The move to RAAs has made it even more unclear who holds the records and how adopted adults could access them.
- Partner Adoptions – post Covid this has become a large part of the RAA’s work, as families seem to have reviewed their situations and decided that this is something they want to take further. The allocation of stepparent adoptions has a significant impact on our capacity to allocate assessments of adopters for children who do not have families and can pose real dilemmas around the allocation of limited resources.
- There is still much to do and the first two years of One Adoption South Yorkshire have been particularly challenging as a result of the pandemic and the distortions it seems to have made, and is still making, on practice and on the understanding of the needs of children across all services. Nevertheless, the managers, the practitioners, the adopters and the partners of the new RAA have made a fantastic effort to make the new agency a success and we are well on target to implement the 3-year development plan and meet the needs of the partner agencies and South Yorkshire children who need adoptive families into the future.





## **Rotherham Fostering Service**

### **Annual Report**

**2022/23**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023**

## 1. Introduction

This report is an annual report that provides an overview of the business and activity within Rotherham Borough Council's Fostering Service in 2022/23.

The report provides performance and activity data on the service, reports on the activity and functioning of the Fostering Panel, and details service developments that have occurred in the year and those that are planned moving into 2023/24.

### Local and National Context

The following statistics give the context coming into the start of 2022/23 to provide an understanding of the circumstances the service is working in during this reporting period.

An area for concern is that the demand for foster carers is rising due to increasing numbers of children in care, however approved fostering places have decreased by 5% since 2018 to 74,660 in England as of March 2022. The demand nationally for foster carers has increased by 11% whilst fostering households have only increased by 2%. (Source DfE). The number of children in care reached just over 82,000 in the UK as of March 2022 – up 2% on the previous year and continuing the increase seen in recent years. The rate of looked-after children increased from 67 per 10,000 children as of March 2021 to 70 per 10,000 children as of March 2022 (Source: DfE).

In Rotherham, the rate of children in care (per 10,000 children under 18) as of the end of March 2022 was 99, a reduction from 2020/21's local rate of 104. It is higher than the average rate in Yorkshire and The Humber of 81 (which increased from 78 in 2020/21). (Source: LG Inform).

In the most recent national reporting, mainstream and family and friends' carers have been split to provide a more accurate picture of fostering families in England. In England, as of 31 March 2022, there were a total of 43,905 fostering households; 36,050 were mainstream fostering households and 7,855 were family and friends' households. There was a total of 61,360 foster carers. This represents a slight decrease compared with last year. However, if the last 2 years are excluded as potential anomalies due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it represents an overall decrease in the number of foster carers over the years, with a 4% decrease from 2017 to 2018 (63,815 carers).

As in previous years, local authority agencies continue to account for about 6 in 10 of all carers (58%). In the local authority sector, the number of carers has decreased by 8% since 2017 to 2018; in the IFA sector, it has increased slightly, by 2%, in the same period. (Source: DfE)

The national age demographic presents a picture that the current foster carer workforce is aging, and with retirement presented as a key reason as to why foster carers are leaving the workforce (Source: DfE), this is another challenge to consider and is reflected in our local deregistration statistics also.

It is clear that Rotherham needs to increase its placement sufficiency for children in care to meet increasing and predicted demand.

The number of fostering households are not increasing in line with this and therefore, we are at risk of not having sufficient placements available. As of 31 March 2022, there were 562 children in care in the RMBC district – of which 158 were in an in-house provision.

## **The Focus in Rotherham in 2022/23**

Our fostering strategy in 2022/23 focussed on the continued use of online marketing through our partnership with communications and marketing agency BrightSparks and a significant return to our in-house marketing strategies in addition to this. The primary difference being our increased physical presence in the community which had significantly reduced during the COVID pandemic. In addition, there has been a drive to improve the retention of our existing foster carers through an improved support offer and development opportunities for carers.

Section 2 of this report will present more in-depth local data from 2022/23.

A significant challenge continues to be the number of independent fostering agencies who are actively recruiting foster carers in the area and the difficulty that the council has in competing with their offer to foster carers. However in 2022/23 our ambitious recruitment and retention strategies have yielded good results when looking at the comparative data.

Our strategy consists of:

- An enhanced and comprehensive learning offer with flexible options to suit all types of foster carers.
- Enrichment opportunities both as a service and in partnership with the Rotherham Foster Carer Association (RFCA).
- An enhanced financial offer to account for increased cost in living and to enhanced and complex care payments available where required. Discounts also available to foster carers through access to a MAX card.
- Robust support offer including support groups, our use of the Mockingbird Family Model and easy access to our in-house Rotherham Therapeutic Team
- Opportunities to develop and progress as a carer through our payment for skills model.
- An improved welcome pack and a buddying system to support newly approved foster carers.
- Recognition of good practice and long service through nominations celebrated during foster carer forums.
- Pathways to Care – to extend foster carers property and increase fostering capacity in existing pool of foster carers.
- Multiple opportunities for foster carer consultation and feedback through foster carer forums, working together groups and the foster carer health survey.

This annual report outlines the work of the Fostering Rotherham service during 2022/23 to become more competitive in the marketplace, and ultimately attract and retain quality foster carers.

Despite national challenges and the legacy impact of the pandemic there were many successes:

- Achieved Ofsted status of GOOD.
- Approved 11 mainstream foster care households with the capacity for up to 18 task centred placements and 2 second home placements and approved 1 family and friends carer providing a placement for 3 children.
- 'Matched' 9 children to permanent foster homes over the year including 6 with independent fostering agencies and 3 with in-house foster carers.
- Conducted first fostering health survey which demonstrated that almost all foster carers feel highly supported by their supervising social worker and the wider fostering community.
- Returned to in-person marketing, panel, training, support, and activities following the pandemic with positive outcomes for both recruitment and retention.
- Implemented a new process for foster carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies which makes use of the records already held on a carer within their current agency. This has enabled us to significantly reduce the time taken to complete an assessment, therefore allowing carers to transfer agencies much more quickly and reducing drop off as a result.
- Uplifted fostering skills and allowances 2023/24 in line with the national increase of 12.43% including holiday, birthday, and celebration allowances.
- Secured a fostering recruitment Pledge from each Directorate. The action plan and progress are reported into the Strategic Fostering Working Group. Examples of things we have achieved include a Council Tax leaflet mailout to advertise fostering, Finance webpage link to fostering, supported attendance at community events, publishing fostering in the Home Matters Magazine, secured additional funding for recruitment activity from the Rotherham Partnership Fund, established Library fostering ambassador, secured a regular feature across 10 months of the year in the Rotherham Advertiser and a screensaver to promote Fostering.
- Increased the number of support groups.

### **Key Outcomes from 2022/23 recruitment communication and campaign plan**

- 1300 information packs downloaded.
- 251 initial enquiry calls completed.
- 90 (approximate) households interested in fostering visited
- 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers for a range of placement types including short term, parent and child, long term and second home.
- 9 ongoing assessments by year end

## **Retention of Foster Carers**

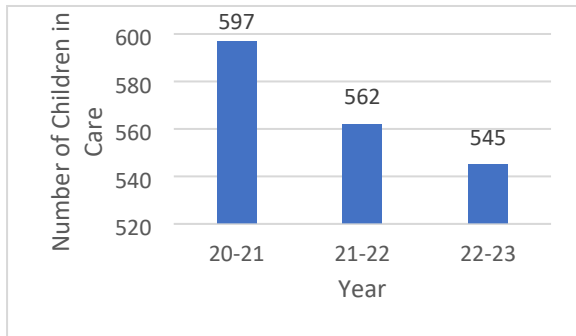
Foster carers from independent fostering agencies continue to express interest in being carers for Rotherham – demonstrating the service are perceived as an attractive option for carers – and whilst recruitment is ultimately important to bridge the increase of children in care, a lot of work is also put into supporting and retaining current Rotherham foster carers.

- Inclusion of BrightSparks in our retention strategy to optimise digital resources.
- Return to in person events – foster carer forums, celebration events and activities.
- Increase in financial offer – option of enhanced and complex care payments for foster carers caring for children with more complex emotional, behavioural and/or health needs.
- Over 30% of the fostering cohort are supported by the Mockingbird Family Model with a plan to extend this to over 50% in the next 6 months.
- Rotherham Foster Carer Association – run by Rotherham foster carers, for Rotherham foster carers.
- Improved consultation with carers through forums, working together group and the foster carer health check survey.
- 31% decrease in deregistrations from previous reporting year

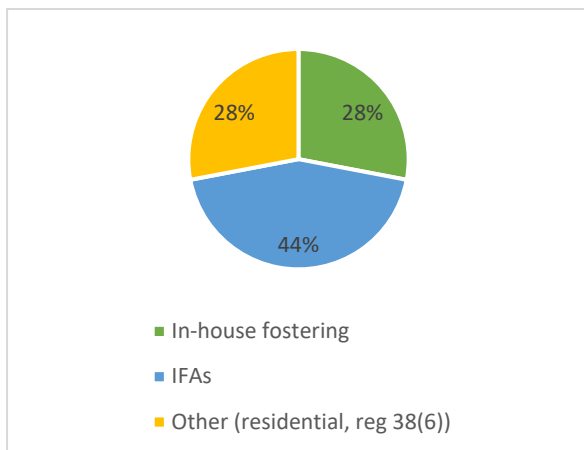
## 2. Rotherham’s children in care population and impact on fostering

### Children in Care population

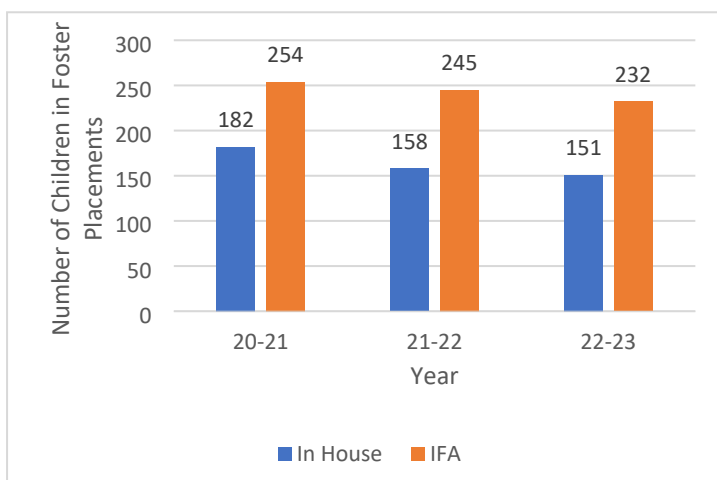
The graph below provides a snapshot of the number of children in care over recent years and highlights how as of 31 March 2023 this has increased to 545 children in care.



### Proportion of children in care in in-house foster placements, independent fostering agencies, and residential provision on 31 March 2023



### Number of children in foster placements (in-house and independent fostering agencies)





## Placement stability, disruption, and unplanned placement endings

Placement stability continues to be a factor in offering an effective fostering service and is crucial to ensuring that the council delivers good outcomes to each child in care. Rotherham Fostering's robust offer of support includes support groups and access to the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. In addition, in 2022/23 an enhanced payment offer was agreed whereby additional financial support can be used to support a placement where the needs of the child are deemed to require this. This is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that the right carers are in receipt of such payments at the right time.

In 2022/23 4 pre-disruption meetings were held in situations where a placement was identified to be at risk of breakdown to determine what immediate support can be offered to support the continuation of the placement.

In the table above we can see that whilst we are very close to the most up to date national average figures regarding children who have experienced 3+ placements in the last 12 months however there has been a reduction this year in the percentage of children in placements that have been stable for at least 2 years and we are below the national average in this area. It should be noted that this data covers children in care in all types of placements, both in-house and IFA foster care and residential, so this figure is not necessarily a reflection of the stability of our in-house foster placements this year.

Looked After Children Placement Stability	March 2020	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	National Average (March 22 – latest data)
%LAC who have experienced 3+ placements within the last 12 months	11.1%	8.9%	9.3%	9.8%	10%
% LAC who have been looked after for two and half years and more in the same placement 2+ years	62.1%	69.2%	70.2%	64.7%	71%

### Unplanned Endings & Disruptions

In 2022/23 there were 9 disruption meetings held following the unplanned ending of the placements of 10 children in care.

Key themes included:

- Difficulty in obtaining respite when needed.
- Increasing challenging/ risky behaviour beyond what was manageable for the carers, particularly in the case of sibling groups.
- Foster carers own emotional wellbeing.
- Matching considerations and impact on other fostered children in the home.

- Emergency placement when new into care so information not known / Not enough information provided in initial referral preplacement – changes in CSW also impacting on information available and case management in general.
- Pressure of school being far from placement in terms of transport, time and social impact on child and local authority not supporting a school move
- Impact of covid 19 pandemic and resulting effect on access to support from other carers as well as additional pressures placed on carers.
- The need to make more use of pre-disruption meetings to put in more support at an earlier stage.

### 3. The Fostering Rotherham Service

The day-to-day management of the fostering service is the responsibility of the fostering management team. These team managers report to the fostering service manager, the head of service for Looked After Children, the children’s social care service assistant director, Rotherham’s children’s social care service director. As the fostering service is a local authority council service it is also accountable to the council’s cabinet. The fostering service provide regular updates to the senior management team and the corporate parenting panel.

The fostering service in Rotherham comprises of three teams; ‘Recruitment Team’; which focuses on the recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers; and two ‘Supervisory Teams’ which focus on the support and supervision of mainstream foster carers as well as our carers offering more specialist care including carers providing short break care for disabled children, Private Fostering and Connected Carers, and the Mockingbird Project.

In line with the regulations, the service has a Fostering Panel chaired by a skilled, independent, and experienced social work professional. The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the suitability of foster carer applicants and existing foster carers’ ongoing terms of approval and are advised about foster carers leaving the agency. The service also employs a panel advisor who is a suitably experienced social worker with a strong knowledge and background in fostering and who also supports with service development across the whole service.

An overview of the service structure can be seen in the figure below:



The level of experience, expertise, and stability of staff in the fostering service is a strength. It enables the service to build strong relationships with foster carers, children's social workers, as well as other parts of the organisation and partners.

The Fostering Rotherham service is also committed to a workforce that operates a therapeutic approach, with this embedded in the supervision, training and support offered to fostering households. The service has good ties with the Rotherham Therapeutic Team who offer regular training opportunities to the team to continue to embed a therapeutic model across fostering practice. This is an area that will have continued focus in the next financial year.

### **What types of placements do we offer?**

The Fostering Service aims to provide suitable placements for all children and young people who are in care in Rotherham and offers a range of foster placements:

- *Task centred foster placements* for children of all ages needing emergency and short-term placements;
- *Respite care (also known as Second Home care)*, offering time-limited breaks to families;
- *Day care* for looked after children and young people when foster carers need to attend meetings or training events;
- *Long term permanence placements* for children and young people who cannot return to birth family and where adoption is not the plan;
- *Parent and child placements* - these placements are to assist in assessing parenting abilities to safely care for the baby and where appropriate to help in developing parenting skills
- *Rotherham's Mockingbird Family Model*. This is an extended family model that provides second home care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities. Within each Mockingbird Hub there will be a Hub Home Carer whose role it is to build strong relationships with everyone in the constellation, empowering families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate or lead to placement breakdown, which increases protective factors around the children. They do this through providing regular second home care and planning activities and events which bring the constellation together as a supportive community.
- *Families Together* – short break placements in partnership with parents/carers, for children and young people with a disability.
- *Family and friends foster care (also known as kinship care)* to enable children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, to be cared for by extended family members, friends or other people who are connected with them;

- *Transition foster care* for children and young people who are currently placed in residential care but for whom their longer-term care plan is foster care. These carers undergo an additional assessment to determine their suitability for the role. They then work alongside the residential care home and the Rotherham Therapeutic Team to gradually transition the child or young person from the residential home and into their fostering family. These carers receive a weekly fee, which accounts for the high level of commitment and skill required, as well as high levels of support from both the fostering service and the Rotherham Therapeutic Team.
- *'Staying Put' arrangements* - foster carers can continue to care for young people after their 18th birthday through a 'staying put arrangement'.
- *Supported lodgings carers* provide family-based support to young people, aged 16-21 (25 if in full time education), who cannot live with their own families and who are not yet ready for independent living. In supported lodgings, a young person is provided with a room of their own in a private home.

## **The Roles and Responsibilities of the Different Fostering Teams**

### **Fostering Panel**

The fostering panel is responsible for helping to maintain quality services for children in care and making recommendations about Rotherham foster carers. The panel advisor is responsible for the day-to-day management of the panel system. This includes liaison between the fostering service and panel, monitoring the performance of the panel, and overseeing the administration of the fostering panels to ensure that they work effectively and meet required timescales set out in the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

The panel advisor also quality assures all reports prepared for panel to make sure they are comprehensive and of a suitable standard to be presented, ensuring compliance of Rotherham Council's fostering policies and procedures, and that all relevant documents are available for panel members within statutory and regulatory timescales.

The fostering panel makes recommendations on subjects, such as:

- Whether people applying to foster should be approved as foster carers, and the terms of their approval.
- Whether foster carers, following an annual review, should continue to be approved as foster carers – in Rotherham, reviews are presented to panel at least once every three years following the carer's first review.
- A review of approval following an allegation, complaint, or a serious concern about a foster carer. In some cases, the panel may recommend that the carer's is deregistered.
- Whether family members or friends should be approved as foster carers for specific children. This is known as a Regulation 24 placement.

### **Who is part of the fostering panel?**

There are specific requirements about the membership of a fostering panel. Rotherham's fostering panel is composed of people with a range of experiences and backgrounds who have been recruited by the panel advisor, on behalf of the fostering service, to be on a central list. To be quorate, the panel must have at least five people sitting, including:

- The chair or vice-chair.
- A social worker with at least three years of relevant post-qualification experience.
- And at least three other members.

All panels retain a full membership and any issues of quoracy have been managed by central list members joining panels on a temporary basis to cover for absences.

### **Rotherham's Fostering Panel Membership**

The Panel maintained a comfortable number of panel members on a 'Central List.' Each panel member who served for a year had an annual professional development review within the year and the panel Chair's annual appraisal was also conducted by the Panel Advisor and ADM within the year.

The panel membership included members with a range of professional backgrounds and interests including elected members, social workers, members with therapeutic backgrounds, foster carers, and members with LAC health backgrounds. This year there have been several new members recruited to the central list including additional social work members who have ensured there are no issues regarding quoracy due to social work presence. We have also welcomed two new elected members, the fostering training co-ordinator who is able to provide scrutiny regarding training and development and an additional foster carer member who works for an IFA. We have also successfully appointed a Vice Chair which was an action from the previous reporting year. Anne Lindsey is an experienced fostering social worker now retired from the Rotherham Fostering Team with a background in fostering both in LA and IFA settings as well as many years in frontline social work.

The current central list can be seen below:

<b>Name of Panel Member</b>	<b>Type of Member</b>
Maggie Kirwin	Independent Chair (Social Worker, care experienced, foster caring experience)
Anne Lindsey	Independent Vice Chair (Social Worker)
Andrew Bosmans	Independent Member
Ninda Randhawa	Independent Member (Magistrate – Youth Justice Courts, clinical background)
Sandra Griffin	Independent Member (Foster Carer for neighbouring Local Authority)

Lynda Briggs	Named Nurse for Looked After Children
Laura McMenamin	Social Work Member (Learning and Development Team – Practice Consultant)
David Busby	Independent Member (Retired LAC Nurse)
Joanne Kelly	Panel Member (PAUSE Project Team Manager)
Alice Kears	Social Work Member (Rotherham Therapeutic Team)
New Members in 2022/23:	
Karen Smith	Independent Member (Foster Carer for IFA)
Laura Marshall	Social Work Member (Fostering Recruitment Team)
Chantal Higiro	Social Work Member (Pause Team)
Sarah Harpham	Panel Member (Fostering Team Training Co-ordinator)
Katie Brooke	Social Work Member (Children with Disabilities Team)
Cllr Gina Monk	Elected Member
Cllr Lyndsay Pitchley	Elected Member
Members who stepped down in 2022/23	
Jordan Haslam	Independent Member (Care Experienced)
Steven Hawksworth	Independent Member (Social Worker and Care Experienced)
Cllr Robert Bird	Elected Member

The panel needs a member with an education background and would benefit from a member who is care experienced in addition to the panel chair. There is also a need to recruit at least one member from the LGBTQ+ community. This will be the focus of the recruitment activity in 2023-24 in addition to any ongoing recruitment which ensures enough on the central list as people naturally move on due to other commitments.

Quoracy has been an issue at times this year where panel members have been unable to attend at the last minute. This has always been managed with other members stepping in at short notice however in the next financial year it has been decided that each panel will have 6 members scheduled in order to ensure quoracy even in the event that someone cannot attend.

### **Panel Training and Development**

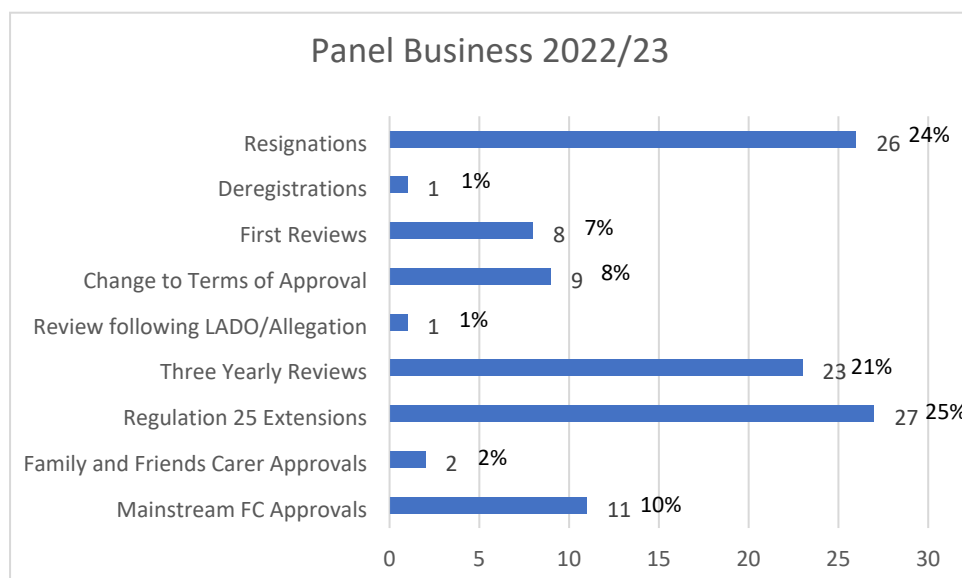
The following training has been made available for Panel Members in 2022/23:

- Panel Members training day in November 2022 which covered Ofsted outcomes, resignations and reasons, regulation 25, parent and child placements and preparing for panel.
- Online PREVENT training.
- Various relevant articles and research papers also sent to Panel Members over the year including links to Coram BAAF online workshops and training courses.

### Overview of Panel Business in 2022/23

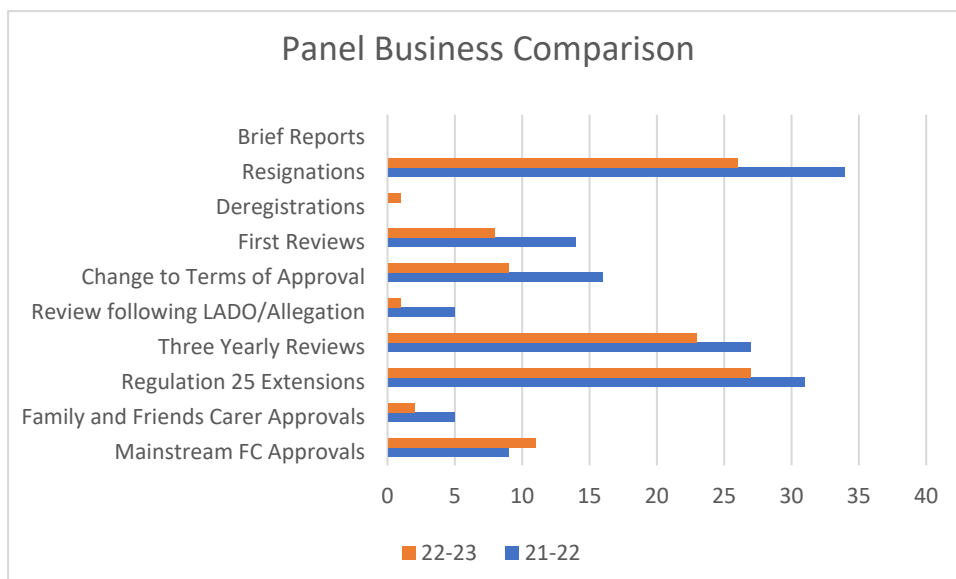
Panels continued virtually for most of the year however the first in-person panel took place towards the end of March 2023 with a plan to hold alternate panels in-person going forward. This decision was made following consultation with foster carers, panel members and fostering staff and is felt to be an arrangement which will allow the service to benefit from the positives of both formats. In general, more complex cases such as prospective carer assessments and reviews where there has been an allegation or complex situation will be heard at in-person panels and more straightforward items such as three yearly reviews and regulation 25 extension requests will be heard at virtual panels. This arrangement will be reviewed in Autumn 2023.

In the 2022/23 reporting period, there were 108 items within 18 which panels considered the approval of:



The below chart shows a comparison in panel business this year to the previous reporting year. There has been a reduction in items coming to panel with 141 in 21-22 and 108 in 22-23 – this is primarily as a result of a significant reduction in the number of deregistrations in 22-23 in addition to the reduction in first reviews as a result of a lower rate of recruitment in 21-22 to 20-21 (which saw an unusually high number of carers recruited).





## Quality Assurance

The Panel are highly motivated to check and challenge by appropriately maintaining the role of 'critical friend' to the department with equal emphasis on both aspects. Where appropriate the Panel will offer flexibility without compromising the fostering regulations and standards. To improve the Panel's role in quality assurance panel members are now asked to comment on report quality within their preparation sheet and this information is fed back to the service via the panel advisor. It would be beneficial if panel's quality assurance role could be strengthened further, and this is something that can be considered for the next financial year.

The continued use of a dedicated Panel Advisor gives greater scrutiny and challenge to the service which ensures continued improvement in the quality of reports presented to Panel. The Panel Advisor also produces a Service Feedback Report after every Panel which is shared with the ADM, Service Manager and Team Managers and comments on good practice in addition to any concerns or themes. Quarterly Practice Monitoring Meetings continued to be facilitated by the Panel Advisor, chaired by the Head of Service (ADM), and included the Panel Chair, Panel Advisor and Senior Management. The meetings focused on performance and practice issues with clear actions agreed. This ensures that the service is not operating in a silo and provides an environment for accountable and collaborative practice development. Themes from these meetings and reports are fed into both panel member and fostering service staff training.

## Panel Feedback

Obtaining feedback forms from carers on the panel process has always been a challenge and although these are sent out after every panel, they are mostly not returned. However, of the forms that were returned the feedback is very positive and included comments such as:

*'We found everyone to be really friendly and positive which really reassured us. Everybody put us at ease quite quickly.'*

*'I wouldn't recommend you change anything.'*

*'I have found the transfer process a lot easier than I thought it was going to be. Rotherham has communicated really well with us from the beginning.'*

*'The panel were very clear with their questions and made us feel at ease, asking us if we had any questions for them. They were very reassuring.'*

*'Encouraging and very approachable.'*

### **Panel Chair's Report**

The RMBC Fostering Panel continues to evolve and develop in these post pandemic days. Although the virtual panels proved to be efficient and effective in managing large volumes of work there was also a recognition among senior managers and panel members that the experience for new applicants and for those carers involved in complex cases might be enhanced by 'in person' panels. This allows for a more personal interaction with panel members which is particularly important when there are more difficult issues to discuss – such as allegations against a foster carer. Feedback of panel's recommendation to carers in such cases is felt to be enhanced by the more personal touch which being physically in the same space allows.

A decision was made to alternate virtual and in person panels to try and allow for the needs of attendees and the service to be more closely met. The continuation of virtual panels does allow for larger volumes of straightforward cases, such as annual reviews, to be handled as all the preparation is collated by the panel chair ahead of the meeting, meaning larger agendas can be managed on these days. It is hoped, going forward, that foster carers own preferences can be met as to which type of panel they attend (as many gave feedback that they preferred virtual panels which often allow them to more easily meet their child care responsibilities as they are done from home with no travelling time and no requirement for day care).

The appointment of a vice chair has been a welcome development. Anne Lindsay is an experienced panel member who has recently retired from her role as a supervising social worker with RMBC, so whilst being independent she has a wealth of knowledge about the service and many of the carers who come through panel. She can offer flexibility to support the running of the panel. It is anticipated she will chair several panels over the coming year.

The quality of reports and assessments continues to improve and develop which is attributable to the team managers and social workers within the fostering team. The QA function of the panel advisor is also pivotal to this. This ensures that a full suite of documents comes to panel with all the information that panel needs to make its recommendations. There is professional respect in the relationship between the panel and the department with the panel advisor liaising appropriately and professionally to manage any difficulties which arise.

The chair, vice chair and panel advisor are continually exploring the make-up of the panel and what can be done to enhance the diversity of experiences within the central

list. This has led to increasingly creative ideas around recruitment. Panel did experience a challenging time when a shortage of social worker members threatened quoracy on a number of panels but the hard work of the panel advisor and the flexibility of members of the central list meant last minute substitutes were always found. I would like to thank my panel colleagues for their commitment at such times.

Once again, the contribution by members of the business support team has been a major factor in the smooth running of the panel operation. Their efficiency and attention to detail is central to the capacity of panel to make its recommendations. Being involved in a number of panels, I am acutely aware of the professionalism which this team brings to the challenge.

*Maggie Kirwin*  
Panel Chair

### **Summary of the Fostering Panel**

Overall, panel is functioning well and there are no areas of concern.

- The panel processes work smoothly, and papers are generally submitted by staff to panel admin on time.
- The QA process is robust and there is an effective feedback loop from panel through to the service via the panel advisor.
- Panel minutes are of a high standard and are prepared and sent to the chair well within the statutory framework.
- Carers are informed of decisions within statutory timescales.
- The Central List is well balanced and foster carers and applicants find panel to be warm and friendly during panel meetings.

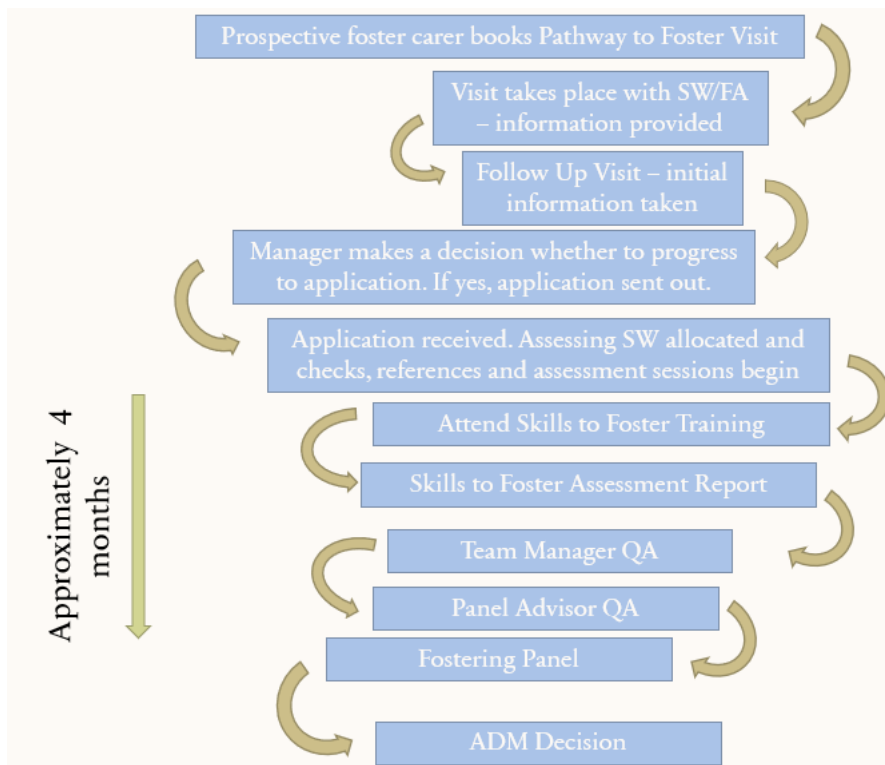
### **Recruitment Team**

The fostering recruitment team has continued to be passionate about recruiting new foster carers through 2022 -2023. We want local people for local children who can open their homes and their hearts to children. We pride ourselves on robust assessment, and knowledgeable and sensitive support to people starting to think about fostering and recruitment. Being accountable, honest, and respectful to all new enquirers is crucial and we are ambitious about what we can achieve in terms of recruitment always striving to engage with as many people as possible.

### **Recruitment Team and Prospective Foster Carer's Journey**

Our fostering recruitment team has 2 fostering advisers, a marketing officer, 5 social workers and an advanced practitioner managed by one team manager. The fostering advisers undertake the first home visit to a new enquirer. When they visit the enquirer will have already spoken with one our colleagues from Bright Sparks. The fostering advisers hold a 'caseload' of enquirers and will visit them on average 2-3 times before compiling a pathway report which makes a recommendation about progressing to the application stage. Once we receive an application form it is allocated to a recruitment social worker who will plan the assessment with an aim of presenting their report to a panel within 4 months. During this four-month period the applicants will attend Skills to Foster training which is run by the recruitment social workers. Other training may

be made available within this period to help prepare the applicants for the role of fostering. As a result of the new processes, we have found that no enquirer is ever lost and those that progress to an application and start an assessment are much more likely to become approved carers. New foster carers have spoken about good customer service, knowledgeable workers who guide them and generally have a positive start to their fostering journey. The image below shows the journey of a PFC in Rotherham.



We recognise that some new applicants have existing skills, and we will make an assessment regarding the most suitable skills level payment. We introduced an offer of skills level 2 for all child work force professionals and a minimum of level 3 for all applicants with previous experience of fostering.

Like many authorities we found recruitment challenging in 2022 – 2023 due to the cost-of-living crisis, the end of the pandemic meaning many people returned to work outside of the home.

### Bright Sparks

We have worked with the digital media organisation Bright Sparks since Sept 2019 and renewed our contract with the company in April 2022. As part of the new contract, we worked closely with Bright Sparks to develop a new, ambitious way of working with potential foster carers. From our joint work we recognised that not every potential

foster carer (PFC) who made an enquiry with us and downloaded our information pack was ready to progress to being a foster carer. However, they may be ready in the future. The new approach meant we spent more time working with people in these early stages, answering their questions, sharing resources with them, putting them in touch with other foster carers and helping them to feel confident in moving forward to application stage. If they still need more time, then our bespoke system keeps in touch with them through emails and newsletters as well as a phone call when the time is right for them to come back. Nobody is lost from the enquiry process, but everybody should be worked with at the pace that is right for them whether that means they are contact in 3 months or 2 years.

Bright Sparks continue to manage our online presence on social media, google ads and run our virtual drop ins with support from our fostering staff team.

### **Place Based Marketing**

From January 2023 Fostering Rotherham have benefited from a Team Manager and Marketing Officer partnership focus on marketing and recruitment. An RMBC and Brightsparks co-produced Recruitment and Retention Strategy has been created with a clear plan of how the budget will be spent throughout the financial year to maximise number of approvals for 2023/24.

There has been a re-branding of Fostering Rotherham with new merchandise to support the place-based marketing campaign. Fostering Rotherham have achieved a greater presence within the local community hosting information stands in different wards and handing out leaflets at Parkgate Shopping Centre and RUFC. We have been working closely with SLT leads to draw up fostering pledges from each department. With the support of our Rotherham partners, we have a regular feature in the Fostering Families Digital Newsletter, the Home Matter's Magazine and an article in the e-bulletin that goes to 24 different wards. A fostering advert also featured on the back of the Council Tax letter to all households in the Rotherham borough in March/April. We have undertaken some internal marketing targeting council retirees and we attended a Women's International Day providing a supervising social worker and foster carer to answer some questions about fostering.

We also started to revamp and expand on our selection of leaflets: What Makes a Good Foster Carer? Fostering siblings and Fostering Teenagers, Myth Busting, Families Together, Different Types of Fostering, Fostering Children with Disabilities and a general fostering leaflet including Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic translation calling potential foster carers from ethnic minority groups to action. March marked the beginning of a bespoke recruitment campaign to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds with Fostering Rotherham having a presence at the Asian Bazaar. We were able to use the John Lewis Christmas advert as a platform to launch our own 'Get Your Skates On' campaign skating event, a comment from the male foster carer in the advert and media coverage.

Throughout the final quarter of the year, we have continued to advertise Fostering Rotherham with Heart FM and we now have a regular feature in the Rotherham Advertiser and Weekend newspapers.

We made a successful application to the Rotherham Partnership fund, and this has enabled us to secure a partnership with Rotherham United Football Club and have featured in the programme and advertisement of fostering for Rotherham on two billboards in prime locations in Rotherham.

Several of our foster carers participated in interviews to provide us with new material to use for place based and social media marketing enabling us to continually re-fresh our content.

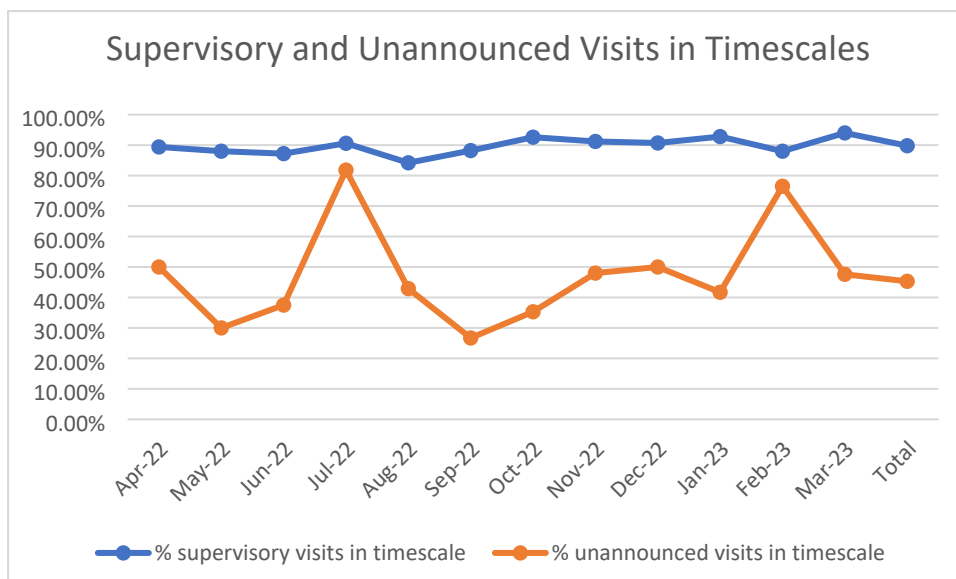
There has been strong senior management support with review of fees and allowances, consideration of new financial rewards and an enticing 'pathway to transfer' for independent foster carers wanting to return to local authority fostering in Rotherham. Fostering has become everybody's business in the council, and we will be continuing to push this agenda into the new financial year.

## **Fostering Supervisory Teams**

### **Fostering Supervision and Support**

Foster care is a demanding task involving significant responsibilities. From the point of approval, foster carers all have a dedicated supervising social worker. Best practice includes formal handover from recruitment worker to supervising social worker with the foster carer. The recruiting social worker will be consulted around matching, and in some circumstances will undertake joint visits with the supervising social worker to support the first placement where it is appropriate to do so. One of the key performance indicators for the Fostering Service is to provide family-based placements for the children, and supervising social workers review with foster carers any of their placements that are "on hold" to manage these breaks and support the carers in taking new placements. We are continuing to work on providing clear evidence as to why placements are on hold and to ensure that these on hold arrangements are regularly reviewed to ensure that placement capacity across the service is always as high as is can be.

Foster Carers require a level of support and supervision commensurate with the tasks they perform on behalf of the Local Authority. Foster Carers are visited at a minimum every six weeks, with newly approved foster carers visited / supported more frequently at the start of their fostering journey. Both supervisory visits and unannounced visits are monitored and reviewed in RMBC performance clinics. The graph below shows how many visits were completed within timescales each month in 2022-23. On average 89% of supervisory visits were completed within timescales within the review period however an average of only 45% of unannounced visits were completed within timescales. This is something that we will be working to improve significantly in 2023-24 as we introduce an improved performance monitoring process specific to fostering.



Support Groups and training are encouraged and facilitated by the supervisory teams as a significant part of our support offer. More information will follow about our support group and training activity.

All foster carers are required to have an annual review, and these are all signed off by the ADM with panel also having oversight at least every three years and when there has been a disruption or allegation.

### Private Fostering

In 2022/23 there have been 11 private fostering arrangements that we have been aware of and where assessments have been completed to ensure children are safe. A private fostering arrangement is one that is made privately, without the involvement of a local authority for the care of a child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) by someone other than a parent or close relative (grandparents, sibling, aunt/uncle or step-parent) with the intention that it should last for 28 days or more.

The importance of raising awareness of private fostering living arrangements across the organisation and within the local authority is crucial to safeguarding children and young people in the region. During this review period there have been several activities undertaken by the service's marketing officer to help raise awareness in the community. This has included the distribution of leaflets to NHS providers and community venues and adverts on social media platforms. We also asked heads of service to promote this through their services and promoted on fostering information stands. In addition to this, the fostering service has distributed information and resources to all CYPS staff via internal email in place to help raise awareness of this type of living arrangement.

Several fostering social workers have upskilled in this review period to be able to complete private fostering assessments when notifications have been referred through. This has been a benefit to the fostering service in that we have moved away from these types of fostering assessments being the responsibility of one person. It has given staff members the opportunity to learn and develop skills and knowledge of

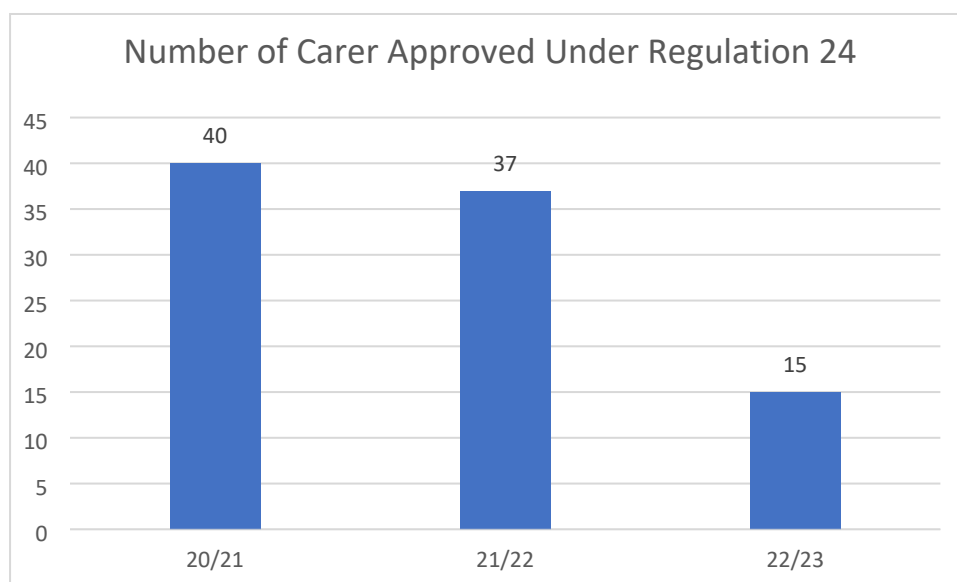


different aspects of working within a local authority fostering setting. In addition to this, meetings have taken place with front line and locality team managers to consider the internal working processes of private fostering; whether this is working effectively and where we can make improvements to streamline this to ensure drift and delay does not occur at the point of notification to allocation and completion. This work is on-going and has involved key members of staff connected to internal recording systems.

### Family and Friends Carers

The service historically had two dedicated family and friends supervising social workers named in the team who were responsible for assessing and supporting connected carers approved temporarily under regulation 24. However, in this reporting year, work has been completed with the staff team to upskill them in terms of completing full family and friends' assessments to support the needs of the service and to further support staff development opportunities.

Whilst there has been a gradual decrease in the numbers of carers being approved under regulation 24 as reflected in the chart below, the number of type of placement can vary month to month. However, to support locality care teams in making decisions to place children and young people under regulation 24 the fostering service has done a significant amount of work in supporting teams to better understand when it is appropriate to use regulation 24 for family-based placements. The downward trend as can be seen below is reflective of this work and the work completed with team managers and Heads of Service across social care.



Towards the end of the reporting year there has been a recognition that regulation 25 used to extend the temporary approval of a connected person has not always been used in 'exceptional' circumstances as the regulation dictates. There has therefore been a push to ensure that regulation 25 is being used only in 'exceptional' circumstances and that assessments both in locality and fostering teams are being completed in a timely manner, ideally within the 16-week approval period wherever

possible. As a result of this we have started to see a significant decrease in the number of regulation 25 reports being presented to fostering panel.

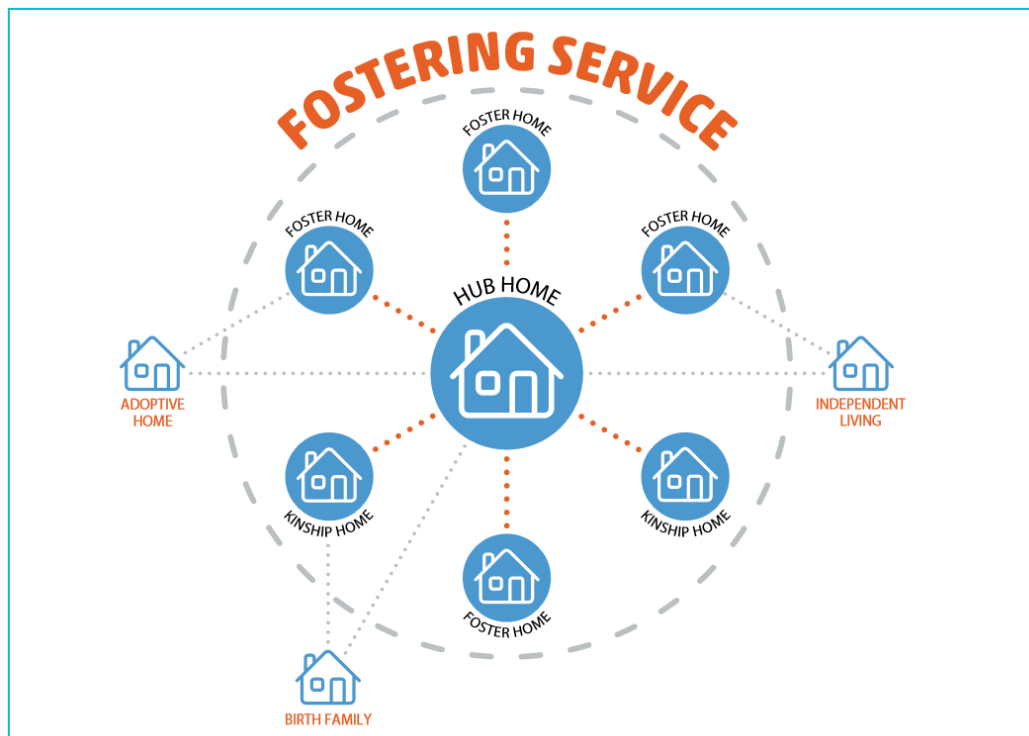
To further support work carried out with family-based placements approved under regulation 24, there has been a significant amount of work undertaken to embed a collaborative approach to this placement type across social care and fostering but not excluding other service areas connected to health, education and housing. Social care and fostering meet on a regular basis throughout the period of temporary approval to ensure that children, young people and their families feel supported, professionals are clear about their role and what steps need to be taken during the initial 16 week period to complete assessment work to achieve permanence for children (where possible) with extended family members.

There is a recognition within the service of the unique difficulties that connected carers often face when caring for children within their family network and therefore the need for targeted support. It is acknowledged that family carers may often struggle financially to meet the demands of caring for children connected to them when thinking about the cost-of-living crisis. Therefore, the fostering service have clear finance processes in place to assist families in caring for children under regulation 24 and post SGO or CAO being granted. In addition, the fostering service has formed close links with RMBC's Post-SGO Service to provide connected carers with access to support groups with other carers in more similar positions. There is also help and support available to family carers in terms of access to a comprehensive training package to help them skill up to manage responsibilities that come with the fostering task such as recording, facilitating family time, and developing their understanding of safeguarding.

### **Mockingbird Family Model**

Some of our Rotherham fostering families are part of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children, and young people, fostering services and birth families.



Benefits to both carers and looked after children and young people include:

- Significantly improved placement stability and reduction in placement breakdown.
- Stronger relationships that support looked after children, young people and fostering families.
- The provision of a robust and resilient structure, which offers support through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved second home care.
- Increased skills, confidence, and role satisfaction for foster carers.
- Higher levels of foster carer retention and recruitment.
- Improved experience of peer support.
- Better experience of birth family contact, including siblings.
- Costs saved and costs avoided.

Rotherham launched its first Mockingbird constellation in May 2018 with a second following shortly afterwards, and then a third being set up in July 2021. One of the hubs also hosts a weekly term time youth club which all RMBC foster carers can attend even if they are not within the Mockingbird hubs. The youth club is well attended and is a popular addition to our core offer.

There are now three supervising social workers, in the role of Mockingbird Liaison Worker overseeing the three well established constellations.

There are plans to continue to expand the Mockingbird Family Model to include two additional constellations in 2023-24. This will require the appointment of two Mockingbird Hub families. Each constellation will comprise of up to ten satellite families, including a maximum of 18 looked after children.

Feedback on the hubs has been positive from both satellite carers and children with comments such as:

*“[The hub carers] are an essential part of the team, both for us and the young person we care for. Their respite care and the advice they give are an integral part of our current placement. Speaking from personal experience, I'm sure they actively save placements from breaking down.”*

*“[Hub Carers] have provided us with practical help on numerous occasions. They are always pleasant and a joy to work with as part of the Mockingbird Group and always help where possible. [LAC] loves to go and stay over and always comes home saying she has had a really good time.”*

*“The Mockingbird Hub has been invaluable for us and our two foster children. We are first time carers and we can honestly say that the help and support from [Hub Carer] has been a lifeline for us. She's such a good listener and never offers advice without working really hard to understand the situation first. She is able to offer different perspectives on situations to help us understand what might be going on for the child, as well as for us. She is also very human in her approach and can empathise very well with frustrations we have - however big or small! Our children are calmer when they come back from a sleepover, and it means we can enjoy some time off without worrying about them while they are away or what they will be like when they come home.”*

## **4. Recruitment and Supervisory Activities and Outcomes 2022/23**

### **Number of Enquiries, Approvals, and Deregistration's in 2022/23**

#### **Key figures to note:**

- 1300 information packs downloaded.
- 251 initial enquiry calls completed.
- 90 (approximate) households interested in fostering visited
- 11 newly approved mainstream foster carers for a range of placement types including short term, parent and child, long term and second home.
- 9 ongoing assessments by year end
- 27 deregistrations – 31% decrease from previous reporting year

In 2022/23 we changed our approach to new enquiries. Whereas in the previous years we were visiting people in their home to have the first discussion about fostering in 2022/23 we made a change and our colleagues in the Bright Sparks agency undertook the first discussion with new enquirers.

Since the onset of our contract with the Bright Sparks Agency we collect data regarding new enquiries in two ways. We can log the number of people that download rate sheets, information packs, sign up to a newsletter or engage in live chats. In the last two years the figures are shown below.

	Downloaded information packs and financial guides:	Information held:
2021/22	1217	257
2022/23	1529	251

Despite a difficult climate our downloads have increased significantly and our calls with new people has remained steady. It is worth noting that there was a period when recruitment activity was stopped in respect following the death of HM The Queen.

Within our new processes for 2022/23 Prospective Foster Carers (PFC) are engaged by the BrightSparks team who book an Information Call. This call is to go through the benefits of fostering with Rotherham and to help people make an informed decision about moving to the next stage of the process. At the next stage RMBC fostering advisers meet with the PFC in their home. We call this meeting a Pathway Visit. Instead of just holding one meeting we offer the option of multiple visits at this stage ensuring we go at the right pace for the family or individual.

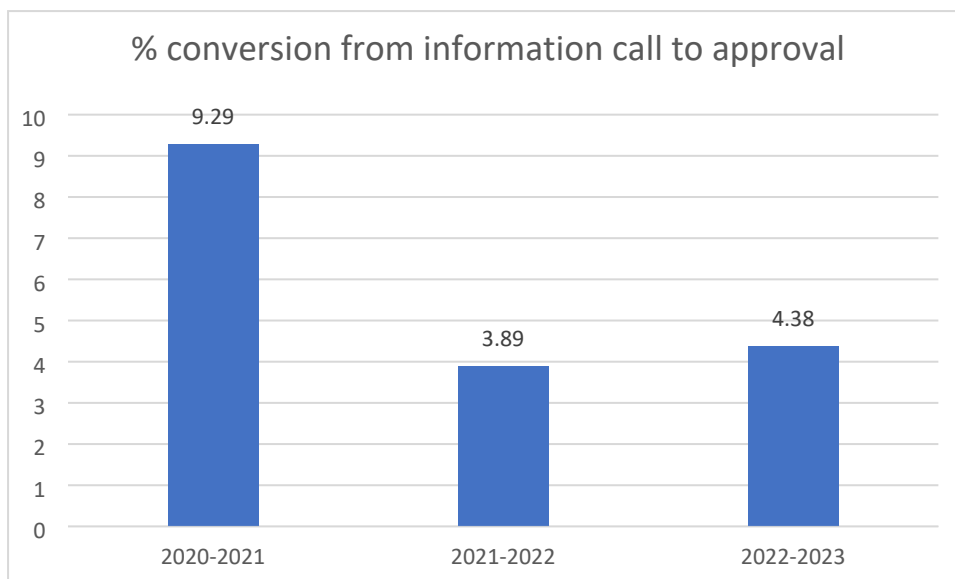
The table below shows how our conversion from Information call to Pathway visit remains similar to the previous 2 years though, as will be detailed in the next section, our conversion to approval has been slightly higher in 2022/23.

2020/21	Information Visits	226
2021/22	Information Visits	257
2022/23	Information Call	251
2020/21	Follow Up Visits	93
2021/22	Follow up Visits	92
2022/23	First Pathway Visits	94

### Approvals

In 2022/23 we approved 11 fostering households; this is an increase on the previous reporting year (10 fostering households in 2021/22).

Our conversion rates for the last 3 years can be seen in the graph below:



Whilst the increase in 2022/23 is modest, it is an increase, and we hope to build on this moving into 2023/24.

Nationally it is noted that there have been reducing numbers of applications for mainstream fostering over the last 5 years and that in both Local Authority and IFAs a large number of enquiries are not translating into applications. The significant increase in cost of living over the last year is likely to have had a further impact on this and it is therefore imperative that we do what we can as a service and a council more broadly to support foster carer financially in order to remain competitive in the market and to retain the foster carers in our current cohort.

#### Family and Friends Carers

The number of family and friends carers approved as full foster carers has remained reduced slightly with only 1 carer being approved in the reporting year. A reduction compared to previous years as can be seen below:

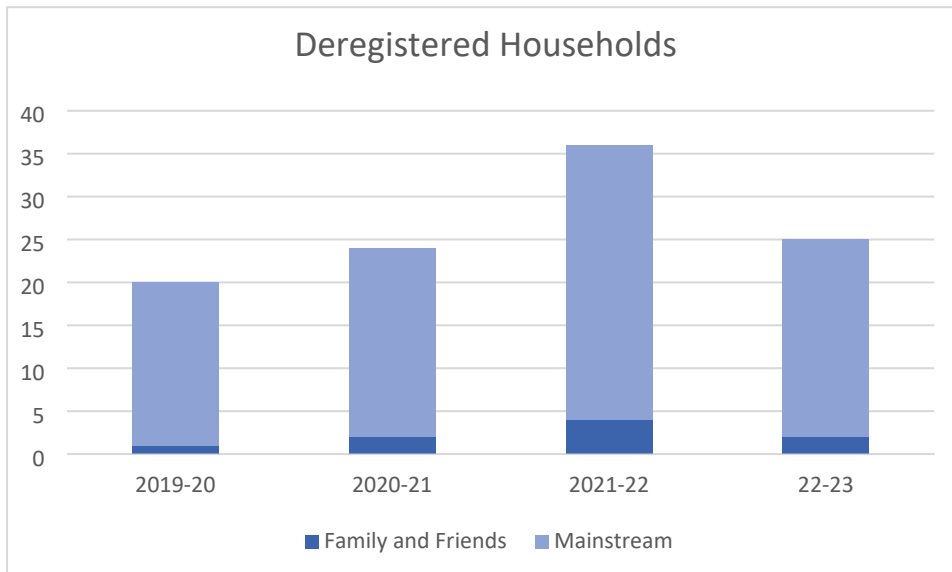
2020/21	2
2021/22	3
2022/23	1

It is anticipated that the number of family and friends carers being approved as full foster carers may increase in the next reporting year as there is a drive to use Regulation 25 extensions to temporary approval as foster carer only in exceptional circumstances meaning some carers may need to be fully approved to ensure placements remain regulated.

#### De-registrations

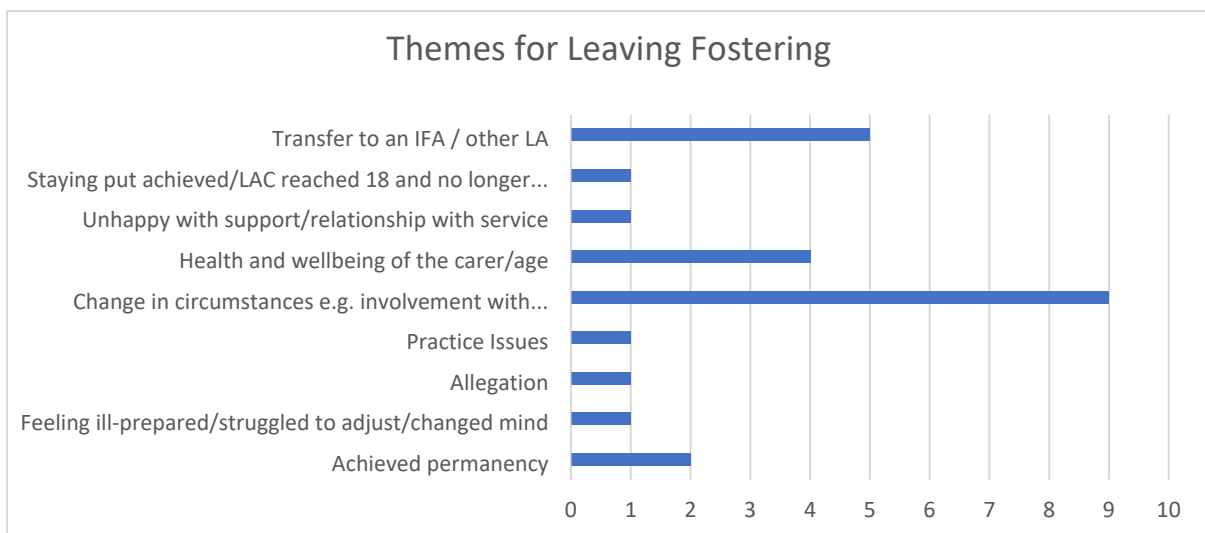
We had a 31% decrease in households deregistering during 2022/23 compared to the previous year bringing the number back to the region of the previous years (see figures below). A total of 25 households, including 2 family and friends carer deregistered. 23

households were carer resignations and 1 was deregistered by Fostering Panel/ADM and 1 was a carer resignation we would likely have deregistered had the carer not resigned first.



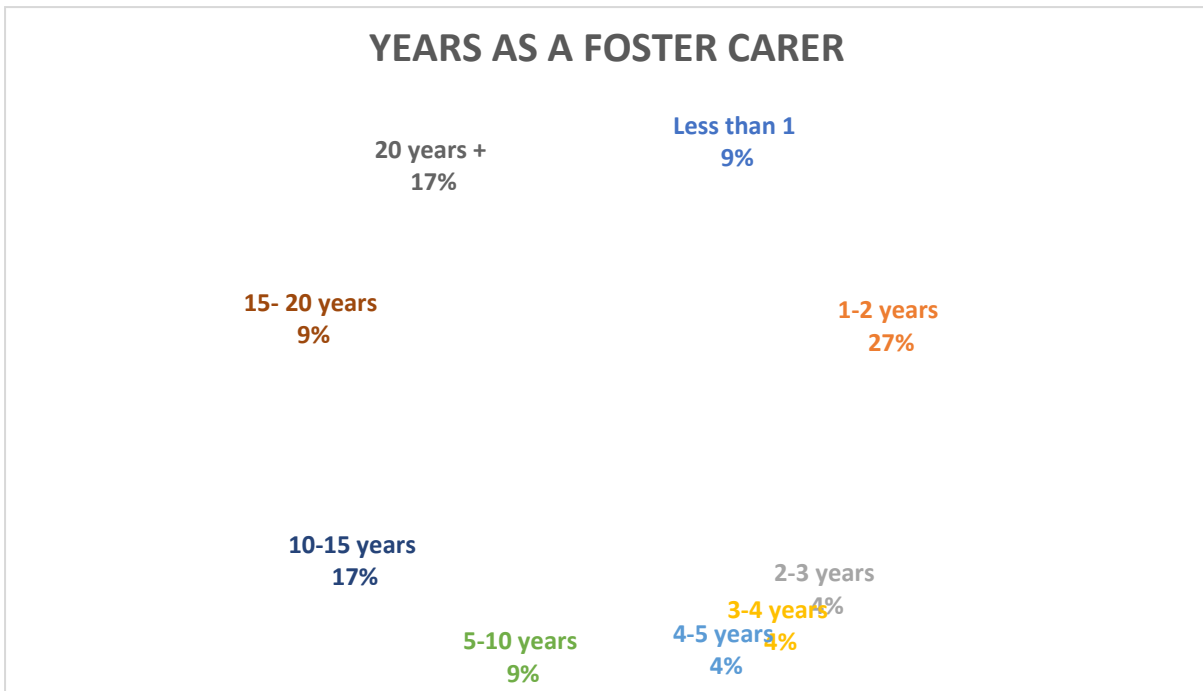
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Family and Friends	1	2	4	2
Mainstream	19	22	32	23

Within the 25 deregistrations in 2022/23 the following themes were identified as reasons for leaving fostering.



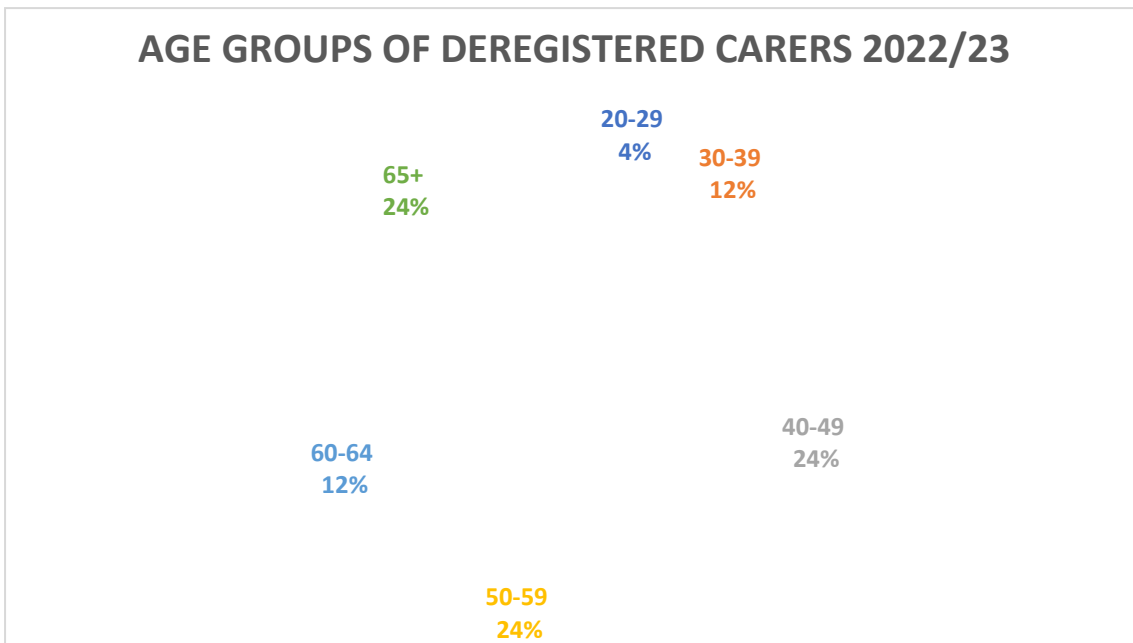
The following chart shows deregistrations broken down by years as a foster carer (mainstream carers only – excludes family and friends who obtained SGO).





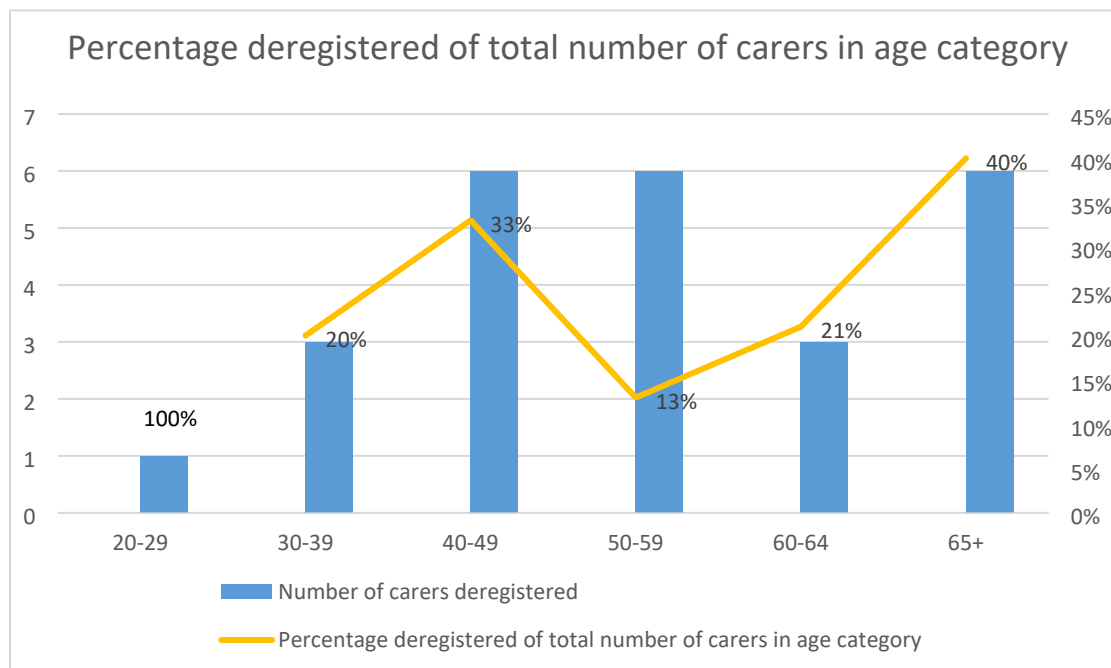
36% of those deregistered had fostered for less than two years, however this figure is not too far away from the national average of 31% (DfE 21-22 - most recent data). We rate significantly better than national average for number of carers fostering with us for over 10 years with the national average being 28% (DfE 21-22 - most recent data) and our data showing that 43% of carers deregistered had been with us for over 10 years.

In terms of age at time of deregistration, our data is also similar to national data.



Nationally the largest group of all approved foster carers were in their 50s and almost 65% of those deregistered were over 50 (DfE 21-22). This is also reflected in our resignation data with 60% of carers resigning being over 50 (main carer age at point of deregistration).

The graph below breaks down this information further, showing the number of carers resigning as a percentage of the total number of carers in each age category.



The 20-29 age bracket has not been included so as not to skew the graph – this figure was 100% as we only had one couple in this age bracket who resigned due to moving abroad for work. As can be seen on the graph below, although the 50-59 age bracket had one of the highest deregistration numbers, this is the lowest percentage of total number of carers because we have more carers in this age bracket than any other. The 40-49 age bracket also shows a high number of losses, and this is a more significant percentage of our carers in this group. This is impacted however by the two deregistrations that came because of family carers obtaining permanence and therefore would be a lower percentage (22%) when these are taken into account. The highest losses as a percentage of total carers are in our 65+ age range which reflects the number of carers who naturally choose to retire due to age or ill health.

Most recent national data (DfE 22-23) reflect the same trend where those carers in their 50s had the highest proportion of deregistrations (35%) and those in their 20s had the lowest (2%). However, when looking at the proportion of carers who deregistered within each age bracket, those in their 50s had the lowest proportion of deregistrations (22%) and those in the 20 to 24 age brackets had a similar percentage of deregistrations to those aged 65 and over (16%).

We can conclude that the majority of our deregistrations for 2022/23 were unavoidable and as a result of natural change in circumstances – for the most part this was due to carer's long term commitment to children either through legal permanency or having cared for a child until adulthood and also due to carers whose health and age has led to retirement. Where other issues resulted in a resignation or deregistration, the service had generally done what they could to support the carers.

Our data shows that we are generally in line with national averages in respect of the age that people leave fostering and the length of time that they foster for. We need to continue to carefully assess and then support our new carers to reduce resignations

within the first two years post approval. We then need to ensure we think creatively about how we can retain those people who have fostered for several years and are often entering a new time in their lives (retirement/grandchildren etc.). This will be a focus of work across the service in the next financial year.

## Engagement, Foster Carer Development and Retention Work

As a service we recognise how crucial it is to ensure our foster carers are adequately equipped, trained, and supported to do their vitally important work. The highlights of our work this year include:

- **Support Groups:** (evening, daytime, and baby carers group) Three groups facilitated on a regular basis giving carers the opportunity for participation and peer support. Utilising a hybrid of both face-face and virtual mediums to suit all carers needs and family situations.
- **Peer support:** foster carers routinely buddied up with other carers, who provide coaching and peer support, particularly to new carers foster carers.
- **Sons and Daughters groups:** a monthly group open to birth children aged 8 – 16 years. Each meeting incorporates an activity and consultation element to listen to the views of birth children involved in fostering, in recognition of the crucial role they play in fostering families and placement stability.
- **Foster Care Association:** A charity run by Rotherham foster carers, for Rotherham foster carers, supported by the service. Multiple events and activities have been supported across the year, bringing foster carers and LAC together including:
  - Weekly youth club
  - Forest School activities
  - Summer Fair
  - Coach trips to York and Scarborough
- **Activities and events:** An annual diary of events for fostering families, foster carer led in consultation with the department. This years' events have included:
  - Easter egg competition
  - Walk at Rother Valley Country Park
  - Picnic at Langold Park
  - Children in need event
  - Mockingbird hub celebration event with Department of Education
  - Skating event – drawing on the John Lewis Christmas Advert
  - Gifts to celebrate sons and daughter's week and hampers for each carer of the festive period in December.
- **Consultation:** We believe that consultation with foster carers is essential to ensuring foster carers feel supported in their task and ultimately enables us to retain carers. There are several ways that we consult with carers on a regular basis:
  - Working Together Group - virtual meeting held quarterly providing the opportunity for a small group of foster carers to meet with a Team Manager and the Service Manager. Actions for the service are then taken from this meeting.
  - Foster Carer Forums – this year saw the return of face-to-face forums every other being in person. Forums are a quarterly opportunity to come

together as a whole fostering community to share updates and feedback to carers and to celebrate good practice and learn together.

- Foster Carer Health Check – introduced for the first time in 22-23 the health check is a survey which covers all aspects of fostering in Rotherham and allows carers to provide anonymous feedback on the issues that most impact on them. The information gathered from the health check in December 22 was analysed by Bright Sparks Agency as part of their contract around retention and highlighted some key areas, primarily foster carer finance that we were then able to respond to as a service. The health check also demonstrated that most carers feel very well supported by their supervising social worker and other carers in the fostering community.
- **Training** - Our training and development co-ordinator understands the unique needs of foster carers and can obtain training accordingly. Fostering is an ever changing and complex landscape where we hold in balance the dynamic of the needs of the specific children in a foster carer's home with the needs of the foster carer themselves. A 'one size fits all' approach to training and development is not sufficient, therefore, we offer a wide range of training courses which enable foster carers to not just meet the National Minimum Standards, but to grow into their potential with opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills. Our training is also linked to our payment for skills model, making it clear to foster carers what they need to do to develop their skills to progress in their fostering career. Below are some of the key highlights across our training provision from 2022/23:
  - 867 instances of training and development have been undertaken (not including some courses where partner agencies have not yet shared number)
  - 56 different courses offered to foster carers (not including virtual school courses or e-learning)
  - 221 individual carers attended/completed learning activity.
  - Carers continue to appreciate the blended approach to learning activities – virtual face to face and E learning. The extended provision and range of e-learning continues to prove invaluable in meeting development courses for carers who find it difficult to access the more traditional face-to-face provision.
  - There is a strong link with the Rotherham Therapeutic Team and the Virtual School which allows us to support carers to attend training delivered by these teams.
  - Carers tell us that their highlights are courses delivered by care experienced adults (Through the Kids Eyes, Impact of Sibling Separation) and those courses delivered by trainers who are also foster carers themselves such as the Men who Foster session.
  - New courses for this year have included LGBTQ+ awareness and Transgender awareness which has been commissioned in from a local charity in Sheffield due to the increasing number of our young people who were able to tell us that they identified in this group. In consultation with carers and the fostering team new courses Teenage Attachment, Fuelling Little Tums and Grief and loss were also introduced which were well received.

- There is a good balance in most accessed courses between practical fostering practice matters such as first aid and recording, and matters related to supporting the emotional and behavioural development of children. Most highly attended courses were First Aid, Recording and Safer Care and other popular courses were:
  - CCE
  - Drugs and Alcohol awareness
  - Sexual health
  - E safety
  - LADO
  - Teenage Attachment
  - FASD

## **5. Key Challenges, Developments, Targets and Actions for 2023/24**

The recruitment and retention of foster carers is a challenging task, and the Rotherham Fostering Service recognises that importance of this. Over the year lots of work has been undertaken to review the fostering service with proposals to make some changes and improve the Rotherham Fostering offer.

In the next year, our key aims will be as follows:

### **Recruitment**

- Grow the staff team to help meet the higher demand for assessments and continue to grow placed based marketing.
- Further develop the fast-track assessment process for existing foster carers moving from other agencies.
- Introduce the Form F assessment template to the service.
- Improve handovers and buddy system for new carers with a recognition that this is key to ensure a smooth transition into fostering.
- Renew video content to share with new enquirers so they can hear first-hand from foster carers and staff in the fostering team.
- Ambition to recruit 20 households in 2023/24.

### **Fostering Panel**

- Improve fostering panel's role in quality assurance with a new QA template and QA time during panel meetings. Themes can be fed into quarterly panel business meetings to ensure actions are followed through into change in practice.
- Recruit additional panel members to ensure better representation – specially from the LGBTQ+ community and from the education sector.
- Review and strengthen the long-term matching panel report and process.

### **Supervisory Team**

- Increase Mockingbird constellations with a plan to add and fourth and fifth.
- Work with Bright Sparks to strengthen and embed our retention strategy.

- Embed exit interviews for foster carers.
- Widen the fostering family activities to include a more diverse range of cultural celebrations.
- Revise the matching process and placement agreement to strengthen decision making around linking and matching.
- Revise and strengthen duty process, with the aim to recruit a member of staff specifically to focus on fostering duty.
- Improve foster carer wellbeing offer in recognition of the highly expectation and challenge the role entails and the need to support carers to prevent burnout and improve retention.
- Reduce the number of regulations 25s by working with locality teams to promote better planning and by encouraging fostering panel to only approve regulation 25 extensions in 'exceptional circumstances' as the regulations dictate.
- Focus on providing clarity around on hold placements, ensuring rationale is clear and a regular review of these decisions is in place.
- Review and revise exemptions and variations process to ensure all parties are clear what is required under regs and that these decisions are made safely.
- Make more use of pre-disruption meetings at an early stage to try to prevent placement disruptions through an early action plan of support.
- Reinstate the annual conference for foster carers.
- Introduce performance and quality assurance monitoring process specific to fostering.

### **General**

- Implement a Fostering Action Plan 2023-24 to drive forward a programme of continued improvement and development.
- Implement a Quality Assurance framework for Fostering.
- Put in place a programme of staff training specific to the Fostering Team to continue to upskill fostering staff and ensure continuous professional development.
- Work on forecasting of placements becoming available both within supervisory and recruitment teams to improve forward planning and try to reduce the number of children being matched at short notice and to strengthen the
- Review and improve the placement matching and planning process to ensure that foster carers have the support in place to enable children to thrive in their care.
- Enhance the Placement stability offer and further embed therapeutic approaches through a closer relationship between the Rotherham Therapeutic Team and Rotherham Fostering.
- Set up a clear quality assurance framework for fostering including an audit template and dip sampling process.
- Review and refresh the skills progression plan to make this clearer for carers and to ensure that the current skills levels available fit with what we need as a service. Included in this a review of how we support new foster carers to enter the service at skills levels beyond level 1.

## **6. Going Forward**

The fostering service will continue to report progress to the Corporate Parenting Panel and Rotherham's Senior Leadership Team.

The Fostering Rotherham service continue to be ambitious in its plans to recruit and retain more local authority foster carers to increase placement choice for its children in care and meet sufficiency plans.

From feedback from children and young people, carers, and wider partners, we know we are making a difference but aim to be excellent. To achieve this, we intend to continually think creatively, and develop and implement service improvements that will result in the highest quality foster care. This will be backed by a strong and forward-thinking communications and campaign plan for recruitment, which together will work to ensure Rotherham's children in care have the best start in life, experience safe and positive care, and can achieve their full potential.



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